SIZES 6-32

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Issue 12 £2.70

Chat

December special

PAGES OF FUN PUZZLES

EVIL ON THE LOOSE

SEX BEAST FREED FROM JAIL TO MURDER MY MUM

TAKE THAT!

I CLOBBERED A ROBBER in the corner shop

Hubby's confession made me LOSE 12st

MY BOY WAS A HUMAN FIREBALL

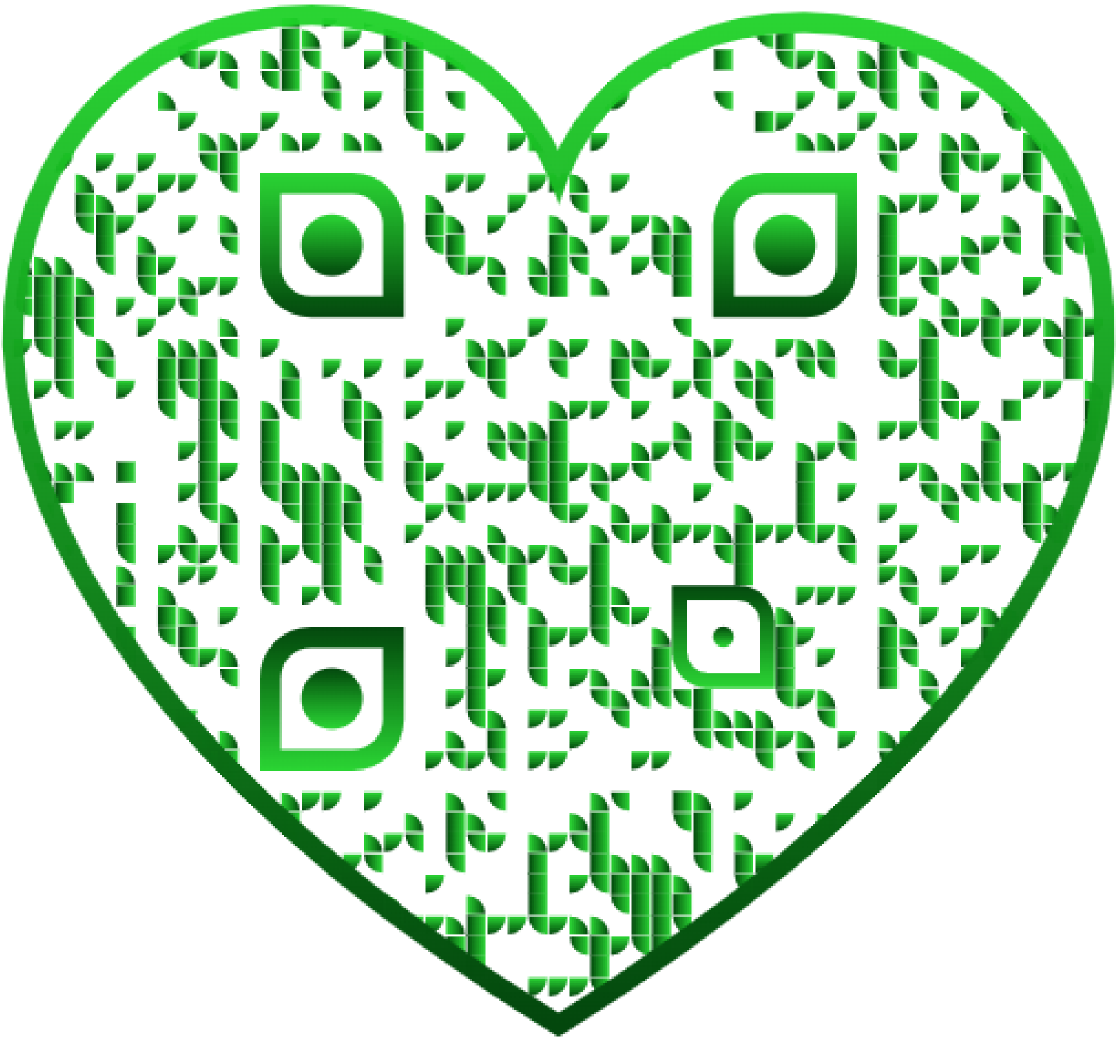
How did he survive?

WHO KILLED HOLLY?

Snatched in broad daylight

GOTTA LOTTA BOT!

I told docs to make it EVEN BIGGER!



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Come on in!
Chat

December Special

Welcome to the December issue of *Chat Monthly*, the perfect companion as you hunker down on these cold dark days and nights. Talking of the temp, we've found the latest coats to suit you, from just £22. Our beauty team have tips for your best ever skin from top to toe and we've got bargain home buys to give your home a cosy update before the Christmas decs come out. Then, there's our usual mix of shocking, heartwarming and funny true-life stories. Gemma tells us how her adorable beagle Nala sniffed her out a hubby (p12). Try not to giggle when you read about Felicia's tattoo disaster - and see the pics (p66). And Tiffany shares how she lives with a rare condition that sees her aging seven times too fast (p52). Her attitude is an inspiration. Not forgetting our pages and pages of fiendish and fun puzzles.

Have a great month!

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COVER PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK, ALAMY, SWNS, TRUE LIFE STORIES, POLICE SCOTLAND, WEST MERCIA POLICE/SWNS, FUTURE STUDIOS. THIS PAGE: JAMES GODWIN, KENNEDY NEWS & MEDIA

Snap happy

I had a fab time with my sister at our local pub quiz – especially when we came in second place!
Hannah Phipps, Modbury

My son Arlo, 6, was spoilt for choice at breakfast time on our recent trip to Chessington!
Kim Coopey, Cardiff

I recently had to spend a few weeks in hospital, but luckily my 2-year-old cockapoo Lily was right by my side to make me feel better when I got home.
Beverlie Harris, Stafford

When my besties come over for pizza and puzzles, we always make sure we have a copy of *Chat* to hand!
Zainab Ali Khan, west London

Frankie, my pup, might be mischievous, but his cuteness more than makes up for it!
Kayli Smith, Rotherham

Look out! Here come Milo and Jerry, my sweet 1-year-old guinea pigs!
Nina Steer, Lowestoft

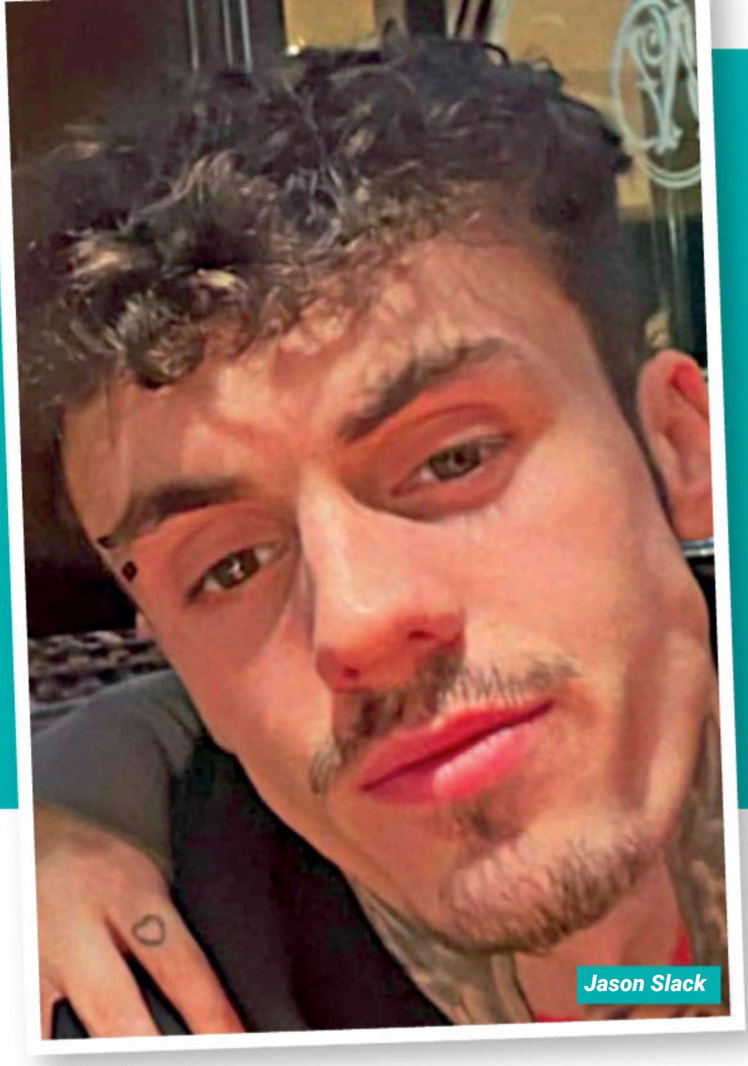
Never mind the luxurious, fur-lined cat tree in front of him, our cat Nox thinks this box is much more comfy!
Reid Edwards, Leeds

Arthur, my grandson, wanted to show off his new hat, but I'd never have guessed this would be his choice!
Beverley Lindfield, Hextable

Hands devil

Jason's good looks masked a very dark side

Jaymee-Leigh Robb, 27, Chilton, County Durham



Jason Slack

With dark, curly hair, deep brown eyes and chiselled features, the guy sitting across the table from me was just my type.

It was September 2020, and I was at the local pub.

Jason, then 19, was a friend of a friend, and I thought he was gorgeous.

We spent the night chatting, discovering that we both loved motorcycles and tattoos.

This man was too good to be true!

The next week, Jason added me on Snapchat, posted flattering comments on my selfies.

Soon, he asked me out for drinks, and from that night on we were inseparable.

By November, Jason had moved into my flat with me.

That's when I noticed how secretive he was with his phone.

Every time it buzzed, he leapt on it, even slept with the phone tucked between the bed frame and mattress.

What was he hiding?

Jason swore he wasn't up to no good.

'I don't like people looking at my phone,' he explained.

It bothered me so much, and after three months I realised the trust was gone.

'This isn't working,' I said, as we sat on the sofa.

Jason moved back in with his mum and I didn't hear from him.

I thought that was that until December 2021, when I bumped into him at the pub.

One thing led to another, and he came back to mine.

'I've missed you,' Jason said in bed the next morning.

Lost in those deep brown eyes, I had to admit, I'd missed him too.

'Let's give it another go,' I said.

It wasn't long before Jason had moved back in with me.

My friend Lucy also lived with us, and we all got on well together.

This time, it wasn't his phone that came between us, but his motorbike.

We both loved them and spent our weekends going to motorcycle meets.

But Jason was storing his bike inside the house.

I put up with it for a few months, but the stench of fuel was too much and it was way too cramped.

'There's not enough space in here and it stinks,' I moaned to Jason.

Just a couple's tiff, I thought.

But Jason's eyes turned dark, and suddenly, he slapped me across the cheek.

In shock, I burst into tears and ran to the bathroom, locking myself in there.

Soon he was hammering on the door.

'I'm so sorry,' he cried. 'I know I shouldn't have done that.'

I'm slowly healing from the abuse

Hearing his sobs, I opened the door, comforting him.

After that, I put up with his bike clogging up my hallway – it was just easier.

In April 2023, we moved into a new place.

By then, I'd noticed how wary I was of upsetting him.

If I went to see a friend, he'd demand to know where I was.

He'd send me messages ordering me to come home.

I'd always been independent, someone who'd speak my mind.

Now I'd just do as Jason told me to avoid a row.

And even that didn't always work.

'You're an ugly w***e!' he yelled one day as I walked in the door after seeing some mates, grabbing me by the hair.

'Stop!' I screamed.

Managing to wriggle free, I ran to the bedroom.

Later, Jason apologised and I forgave him.

There were good times too – we'd have a laugh together at motorcycle meets and he was always telling me he loved me.

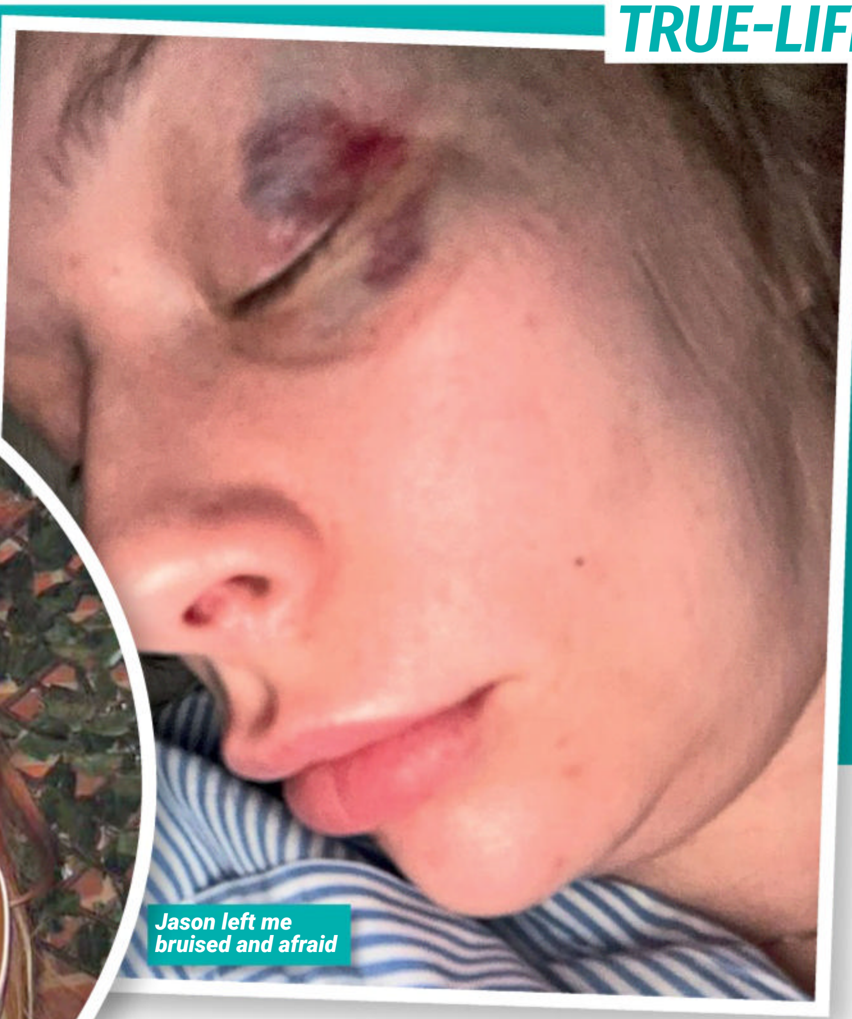
In May 2023, Lucy, then 27, invited her boyfriend Pete to our house.

Jason greeted him, then went to bed early.

After Pete had left, me

WORDS: CHELSEA HEATLEY. PHOTOS: HOTSPOT MEDIA. LUCY AND PETE ARE NOT THEIR REAL NAMES

some



Jason left me bruised and afraid

I didn't know what he was capable of

and Lucy were chatting and giggling.

But at 11pm, Jason came thundering down the stairs.

'There's been another man in the house,' he roared.

My stomach lurched.

He knew Pete had been here, but what was wrong with that?

Furious, Jason lunged at me.

He headbutted me, grabbed me by the hair and dragged me off the sofa.

I screamed as he pulled me around the living room.

He punched me in the head, then bit down hard into my scalp.

Pain seared through me as he ripped out clumps of my hair.

'Get off her!' Lucy yelled.

But he pulled his leg back and kneed me in the stomach and face, over and over again.

Blood splattered onto the carpet.

Lucy was still screaming at him to stop.

But Jason didn't care.

He pinned me to the sofa and wrapped a hand around my neck, then stuck two fingers down my throat.

I gagged and started vomiting, losing my breath.

I could feel myself fading...

'Get the hell off her!' Lucy shouted again.

With that, he released me.

Adrenaline pumping, I was immediately up on my feet, running up the stairs to my bedroom.

Barricading myself in with furniture, I called 999.

Officers arrived quickly, but Jason had fled.

They took me and Lucy to the police station to give statements.

> **I gagged and started vomiting, losing my breath**

'You saved me,' I told her gratefully.

I shuddered to think how far things would have gone if she hadn't been there.

After speaking to police, I went to Darlington Bishop Hospital and was diagnosed with a bruised spine and head trauma.

Two days later, Jason handed himself in to police and was bailed.

I tried to live my life as normal, but I was terrified.

Jason showed up outside my friends' houses, and I saw him in restaurants and at motorbike meets.

Worried that he was following me, I reported him to the police and he was served with a non-molestation order.

It didn't stop him, and in the end I stopped going out, feeling like a prisoner in my own home.

I suffered from panic attacks and developed crippling anxiety.

Finally, in March 2025, Jason Slack, then 23, appeared at Durham Crown Court after pleading guilty to assault occasioning actual bodily harm and breaching a non-molestation order.

It took all my courage to face him in court.

But as the judge handed him an eight-month prison sentence, suspended for 18 months, I felt disappointed.

Though he was also given a three-year restraining order, I'd hoped he would be off the streets.

It didn't feel like justice was served at all.

Now, I'm warning other women what he's capable of.

Don't be taken in by Jason's good looks.

That handsome face looks very different when he's angry.

Believe me, I know.

HELP AND SUPPORT

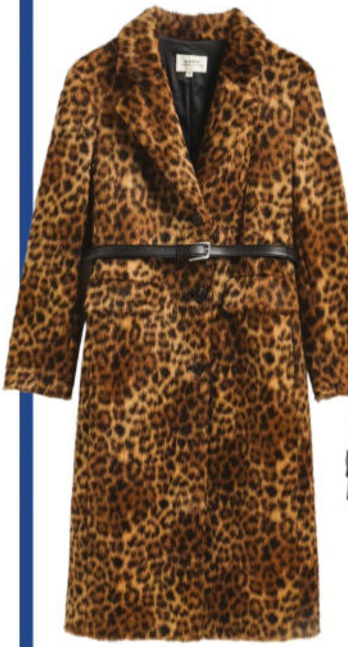
If you have been a victim of domestic abuse, call the freephone, 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline in confidence on 0808 2000 247. Alternatively, you can visit nationaldahelpline.org.uk.

Fashion

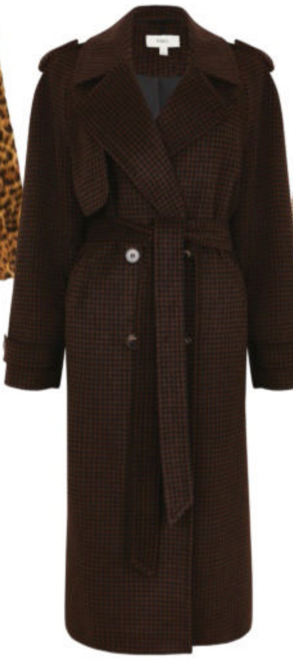
Stylish coats to keep you warm and cosy

BELTED

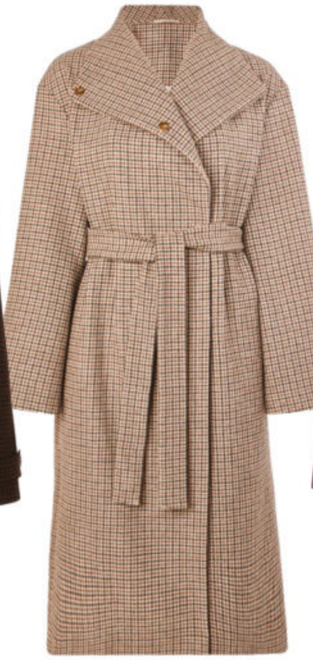
Robe coats are as comfy as your dressing gown but with heaps more polish. The tie waist will cinch you in, creating a gorgeous hourglass silhouette.



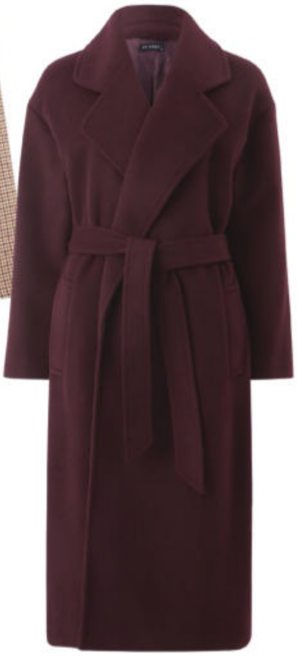
£119, sizes s-l,
reserved.com



£90, sizes
6-24, M&S



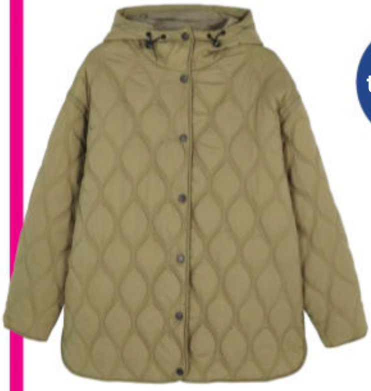
£55, sizes 8-24,
Tu Clothing



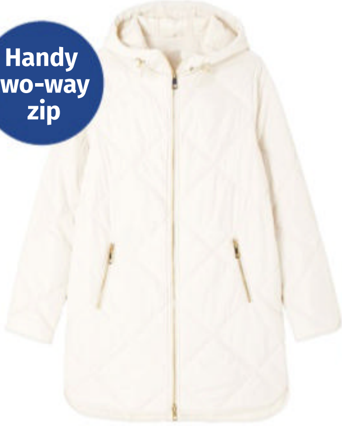
£45, sizes 8-22,
Matalan

QUILTED

A casual classic, a padded coat is no longer just reserved for dog walks. Opt for soft quilting to avoid adding bulk, and team with fitted clothes to give shape and definition.

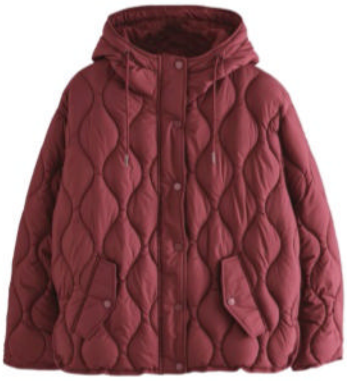


£22, sizes xs-xl,
Primark

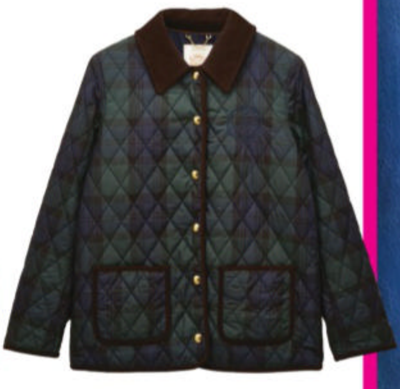


Handy two-way zip

£79.99, sizes 10-28,
Damart

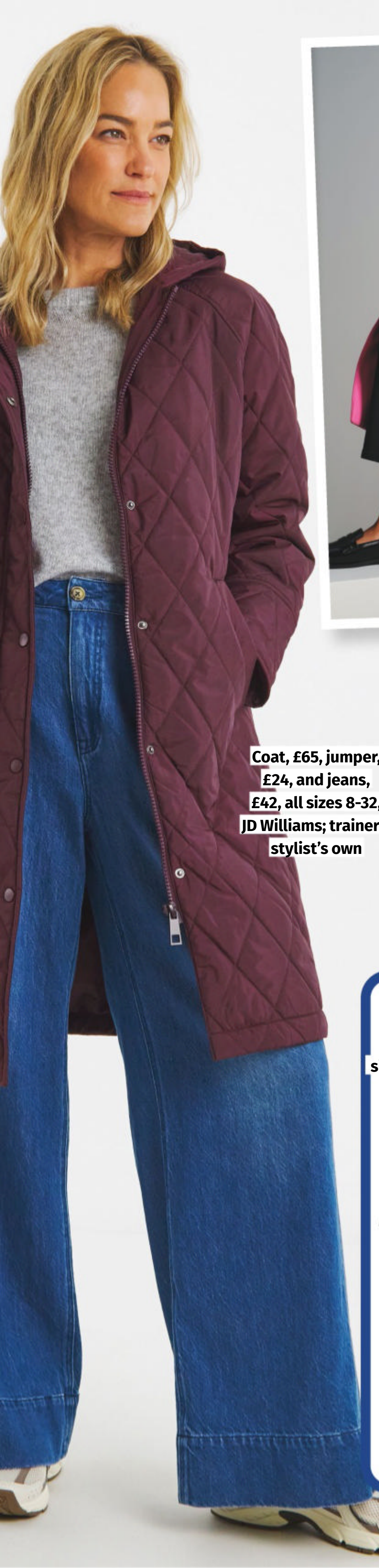


£50, sizes xs-2xl,
Next



£109, sizes 6-26,
Joules

COMPILED BY: CHARLIE BELL

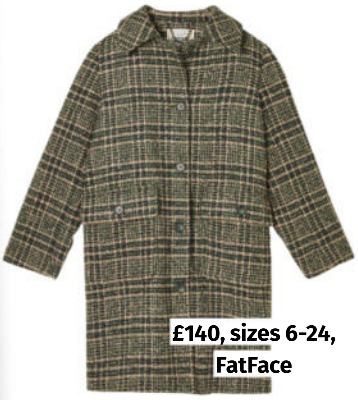


Coat, £65, jumper, £24, and jeans, £42, all sizes 8-32, JD Williams; trainers, stylist's own

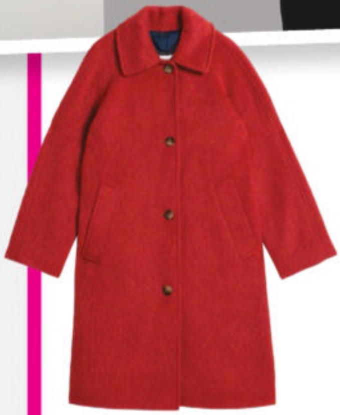
Coat, £36, jumper, £24, and jeans, £22, all sizes 8-22, shoes, £12, and earrings, £5, all Matalan

SINGLE BREASTED

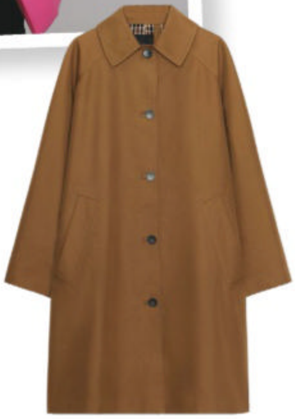
This streamlined style is utterly timeless. Add interest with pops of colour and print or keep it simple in neutral hues. Flattering worn open or closed.



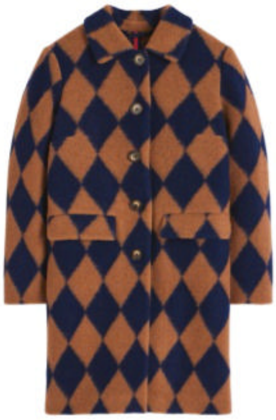
£140, sizes 6-24, FatFace



£160, sizes 6-24, White Stuff



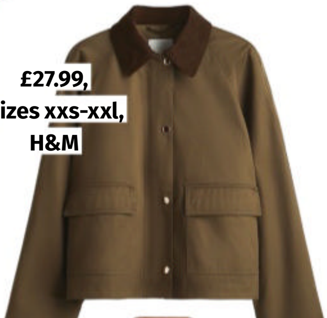
£79.99, sizes xs-xl, Zara



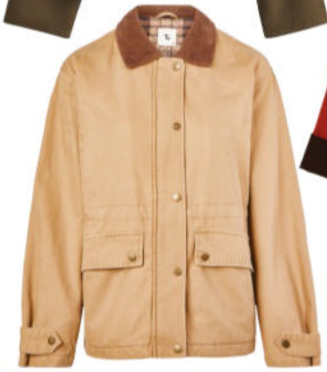
£289, sizes 6-22, Boden

BARN JACKETS

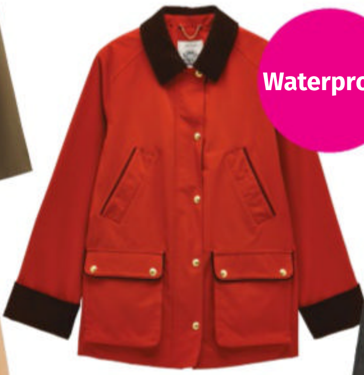
Defined by its contrasting collar, this country-inspired style is cool and practical. The relaxed fit allows room for layering without feeling too oversized.



£27.99, sizes xxs-xxl, H&M

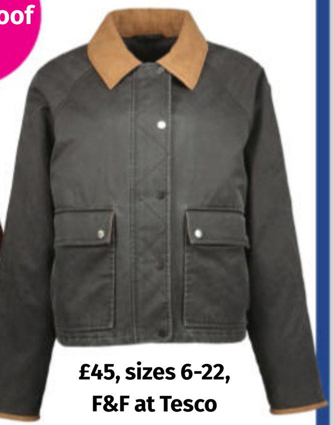


£45, sizes 8-24, Tu Clothing



Waterproof

£129, sizes 6-26, Joules



£45, sizes 6-22, F&F at Tesco

Living night

It was a normal nursing shift, then they wheeled in my

Erica Hutchinson, 37

As the words echoed overhead, it was nothing out of the ordinary for me. 'Level one paediatric trauma,' the announcement said.

I was an ICU nurse, looking after patients in critical condition.

I'd spent almost every day for the past eight years in this hospital.

Taking bloods, changing dressings, providing round-the-clock care for some of our sickest patients.

Hard work, but a privilege to help people.

I'd had to get used to the fact that a normal day at work for me was my patients' worst nightmare.

Only, today was different.

Hearing the announcement, I knew this case was serious.

The patient was a little boy suffering severe burns, in need of urgent treatment.

My little boy.

Today was my nightmare.

It'd started like any other, in January 2024.

Waking early, I'd stepped into my scrubs and clipped on my nurse's badge.

My husband Nathan, then 35, had already left for his maintenance job at an amusement park.

Our sons Wyatt, 13, and Kason, 7, were still asleep, but our neighbour Mike was coming over soon to feed the cows on our farm.

The morning air was cold as I arrived at the hospital.

Then, just 45 minutes into my shift, Wyatt had called.

'Mum, Kason got burnt,' he'd stammered.

I assumed he'd run his hand under hot water, or touched the hob.

'How bad is it?' I asked.

Silence...

Then Mike had grabbed the phone.

'Erica, it's bad,' he'd said.

My stomach lurched.

'Bring him here,' I'd said, knowing my hospital had the only burns unit for miles and we needed to act fast.

I'd rung Nathan, telling him to come in as fast as possible.

Now, in the A&E waiting room, I broke down.

Kason was rushed into the back entrance of the hospital by paramedics.

Desperate as I was to see him, I knew my colleagues had to do their job.

I was taken to the family room, feeling like I was in some sort of parallel universe.

My supervisor sat with me as I waited for Nathan to join us.

After what felt like an eternity, a trauma doctor came in.

'Your son has suffered third-degree burns,' he said, explaining they covered 40% of his body. 'He needs treatment at a specialist hospital.'

In shock, I struggled to take it all in.

How had this happened?

Moments later, Nathan arrived.

Finally, we were allowed to see Kason.

Walking into the room, we saw our little boy covered in blankets.

'You're OK,' I said, my voice shaky.

Kason had been sedated for the pain, but he looked scared and confused.

While I didn't dare check under the blankets, his sweet little face was unharmed.

'I tried to light a fire like Daddy,' Kason said, in tears.

He told us how Mike and Wyatt had been outside while he'd been playing computer games in the garage, which had a log burner.

'It was cold,' he said.

So he copied what he'd seen Nathan do and got some propane to light a fire.

Only, his dungarees were set alight.

He'd gone up in flames.

Kason had run outside, pulling his beanie over his face – saving his head from the blaze.

Mike had used his coat to help put out the flames.

But Kason's clothes had reignited and his tiny body had been ravaged.

My poor boy.

'Mummy's here now,' I soothed.

Nathan and I refused to leave Kason's side.

We were grateful for our friends Nicole and Branden,

We Fight Together
since 1.17.2024
Always love Scars

Me, Nathan and the boys a month before the accident

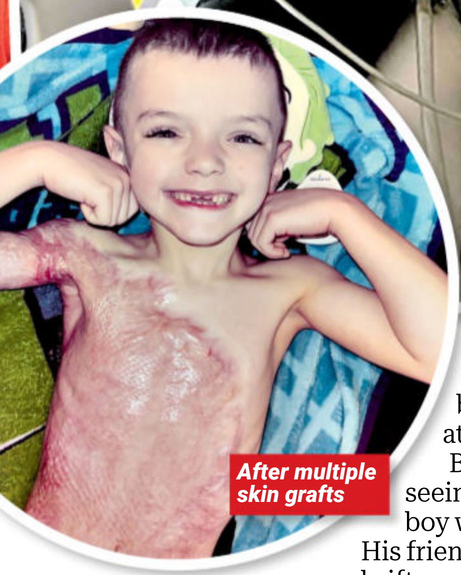
Kason today, back having fun

mare

son

In my job as a nurse in ICU

My poor lad's burns were horrific



After multiple skin grafts

who took care of Wyatt and the farm.

That evening, Mike and his wife paid a visit.

Next day, Kason was air-lifted to the children's hospital. I never left his side.

Kason's burns were so horrific, he was rushed for procedures right away.

As a nurse, I knew just how serious this was.

There was no guarantee my son would pull through.

It was terrifying.

After a couple of hours in theatre, I sat by his bedside.

Consoled him through night terrors.

A doctor explained he'd suffered severe burns to his chest, armpit, shoulder, arm, elbows, bottom and legs.

'He'll need multiple skin grafts,' the doc said.

They'd take healthy skin from his back and legs to help his burnt skin regenerate.

Kason was angry with himself for starting the fire.

'It was just an accident,' I told him gently.

He bravely endured six agonising ops.

Slowly, he regained some movement.

As he grew stronger, he learnt to walk again.

In March 2024, after two months in hospital, Kason was discharged.

Thanks to my nursing experience, I was able to change his bandages at home.

But it was tough seeing my own little boy wince in pain.

His friends sent cards and gifts.

When he went back to school a month later, they were so happy to see him.

It was tough seeing my own little boy wince in pain

That summer, Kason had to be careful with knocks and sun exposure.

But now he's back doing fun things he loves, like dirt-bike riding and swimming.

Since being home, he's had four surgeries, with another two planned soon.

He'll definitely need more in the future as he grows, but we'll have to wait and see.

And I'm back at work, caring for others.

I spend every day surrounded by people fighting for their lives, seeing their worried loved ones.

I know how they feel.

We consider Mike a family friend and he wasn't to blame.

I know he felt terrible but for us, he saved Kason's life.

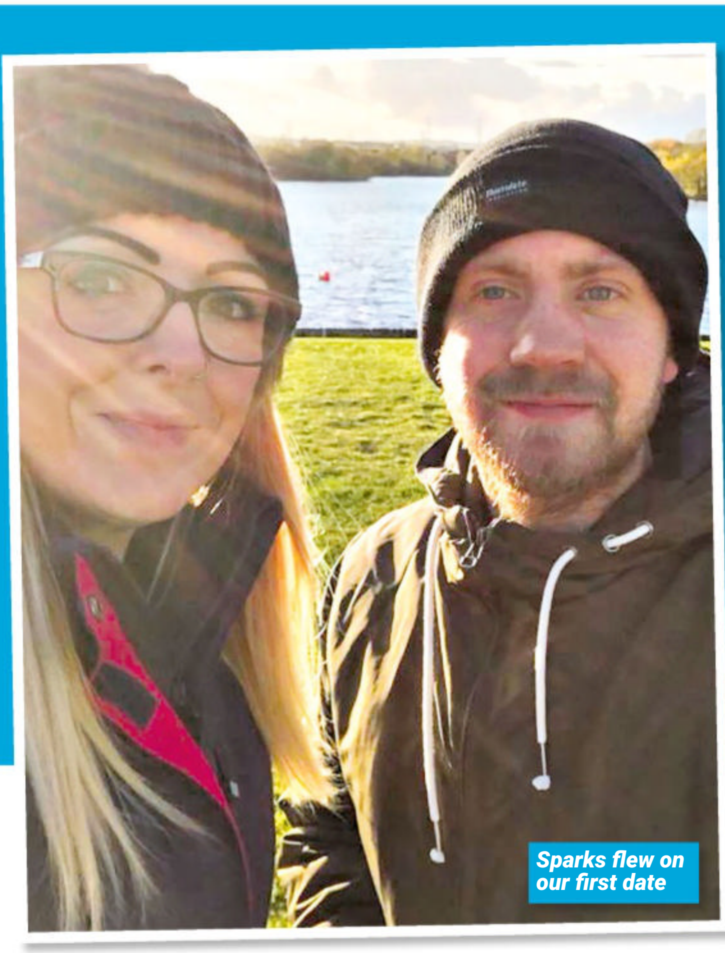
I've since learnt that the dungarees Kason was wearing that day were made of highly flammable material.

I want parents to be aware of how dangerous things like polyester can be around open flames.

And to teach their children about fire safety.

Our lives changed in a second, but Kason's fighting back.

WORDS: CANDICE FERNANDEZ, MISHAAL KHAN. PHOTOS: TRUE LIFE STORIES



Sparks flew on our first date

Mutts about

When it came to matchmaking, our beagles

Gemma Clarke, 39, Rotherham

With my eyes on the road, I tried to soothe my passenger.

'Nearly home,' I reassured, looking in the rear-view mirror.

Howling in the back seat was my new 12-week-old beagle puppy Nala.

It was April 2017 and I'd just picked her up.

I'd been researching different breeds and thought that a beagle, with their friendly and gentle nature, would be perfect for me.

And the second I'd seen Nala's face, it was love at first sight.

'She has a heart on her nose!' I'd gasped, pointing to a little pink smudge on her snout.

Now, three weeks later, she was in my car, making a huge racket.

Back home, she settled in quickly.

But where she'd been calm and snoozy when I'd first met her, now she was a bundle of energy, demanding attention.

'I've got the wrong dog!' I joked to my mum Sandra, then 55, when she came to visit.

But by that June, we'd settled into a routine.

Loved walking the fields not far from home.

Gripping her extendable lead, I let her sniff away but kept her clipped in.

One morning, spotting another dog bounding across the field, I pulled Nala closer.

'Don't worry, he's friendly,' his owner called.

But suddenly the dog pinned Nala down and bit her.

Yanking her pet away, the owner just walked off.

Checking Nala for injuries, she seemed shaken but not seriously hurt.

But she became terrified of other dogs after that.

Whenever she saw another pooch on our walkies, she'd hide behind my legs.

Wanting to rebuild her confidence, I began searching dog owner groups and came across Crazy Beagle Group on Facebook.

They met each Sunday with their beags, around a 40-minute drive from me.

Two weeks after the attack, I piled Nala into the car and Mum and I drove to the field where the group met.

With the owners standing around chatting, I felt nervous.

And with all the beagles barking and charging about, Nala was too, her white-tipped tail tucked firmly between her legs.

But then she got braver.

Wandered off to investigate.

And kept demanding fuss from one man in particular.

'He's good-looking!' Mum giggled, nudging my arm.

Encouraging me to talk to him, but I felt too shy.

Instead, I chatted with others and posed for a few snaps.

'Look out for the pics on the Facebook page,' the organiser smiled as we said our goodbyes.

That night, with Nala snoozing and a bottle of red wine by my side, I saw a notification ping on my phone.

I'd been tagged in some snaps on the group.

And I spotted the hunky-looking guy.

His name was Matthew.

Before I could stop myself, I hit the 'wave' button on his profile.

Within minutes he 'waved' back.

Sorry my dog kept running over to you, I messaged.

Chatting back and forth, the conversation flowed easily.

WORDS: ASHLEIGH PAGE, MATTHEW BARBOUR. PHOTO: NEW FOCUS PHOTOGRAPHY

Our engagement was a family event

you took the lead

The two of us with all three beagles

Evie and Millie have completed our family

He told me all about his beagle, Milo.

He's gorgeous, I replied.

And we just kept messaging each other.

Turned out that Matthew, an industrial radiographer, was 32 and single, like me.

And just as bonkers about his beagle.

After a few weeks of chats, we organised a dog walk to Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

On the day, Nala had to stay home with Mum as she'd come into season but Matthew and Milo still wanted to meet up.

As we wandered around the park, I was so nervous, I couldn't stop talking.

Quiet and reserved, Matthew didn't say much.

He seemed just as nervous as me.

Then, as we walked, Milo tangled us up in his lead. Pulling us close together.

'If this was a romcom, you'd have kissed me then,' I joked.

Matthew smiled and as he looked at me, sparks flew.

With nothing to lose, I leaned in and planted a smacker on his lips.

It was magical.

Living around 40 minutes apart, we agreed to take things slowly.

Chatted daily, and saw each other every Sunday at the beagle meet-up.

A few months later, after a terrible day at my production planning job, I opened a message from Matthew.

A snap of him and Milo on a walk.

And the background looked very familiar...

I jumped up and raced to my front door, flinging it open.

'Matthew!' I grinned, giving him a hug and Milo a stroke.

He'd driven all that way over to cheer me up.

By December we were living together, with our pups too.

> **Milo tangled us up in his lead, pulling us close together**

And in 2018 we adopted another beagle, Woody.

Then a few years later, I fell pregnant and Matthew and I welcomed our daughter Evie in January 2021.

The first time Milo saw her he gave her the biggest lick on her nose.

Sadly, he passed away just 11 months later and left the biggest hole in our hearts.

When our youngest, Millie, was born in January 2023, she completed our family.

Life with two little 'uns and two playful dogs was chaotic, but wonderful.

Then, when Evie began nursery, learning to read and write, she noticed something.

'Mummy, your name isn't the same as ours,' she gasped.

As I explained that Daddy and I weren't married, she wasn't happy.

But in April 2025, on my birthday, after a cuppa in bed surrounded by Nala, Woody, Evie, 4, and Millie, 2, Matthew handed Evie a small box.

Grinning, she turned to me.

'Mummy, will you marry Daddy?' she asked.

Of course I said yes!

Now, we're planning our wedding and thinking of ways we can include the doggies.

After all, we'd never have got our fairy-tale ending if it wasn't for them.

What paw-fect matchmakers!

Without Milo and Nala, we'd never have met

Just for fun PUZZLES!

WORDWISE

You have 15 minutes to find as many words as possible using the letters in the grid. Each word must contain four or more letters, one of which must be the central square. No proper nouns, plurals or foreign words are allowed. There is one nine-letter word in the grid, for which the clue is: **Former, one-time.**

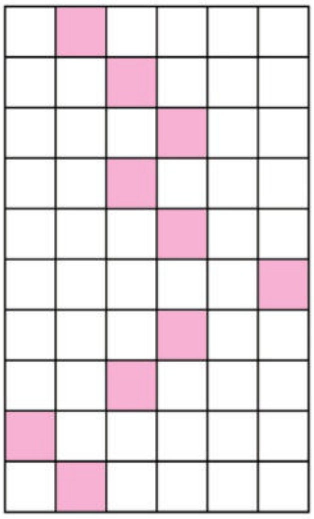
L	I	T
R	W	E
S	H	E

Average = 25 More than 45 = well done

LINKWORDS

Fit 10 words into the grid so that each links with the end of the word on its left and the beginning of the one on the right. Then unscramble the letters in the shaded squares to make a word.

CLUE: The overthrow of a regime by the governed.



WINK		▨					SQUAD
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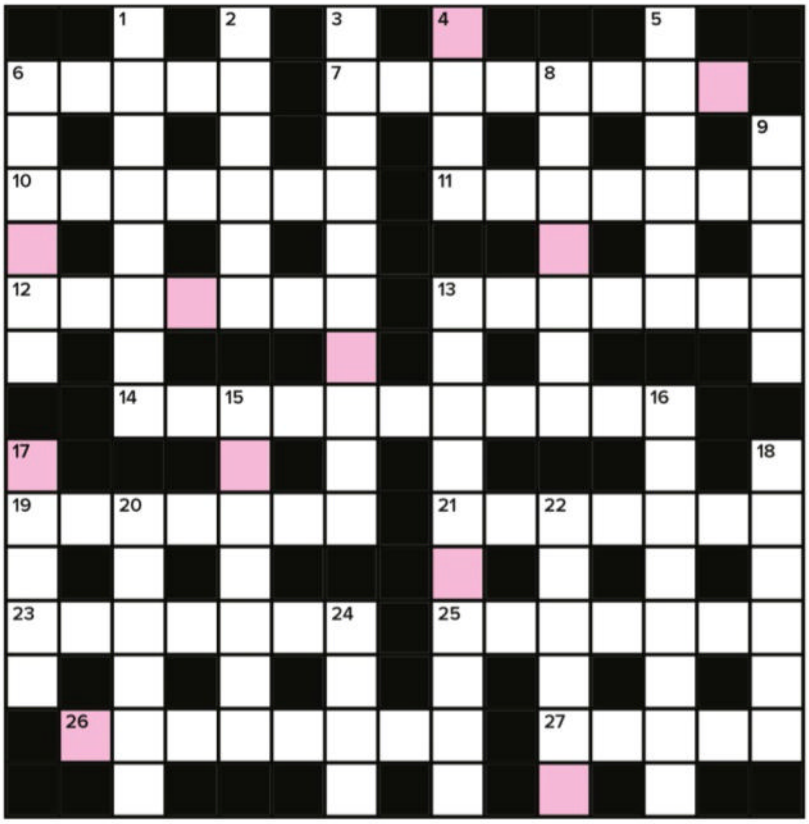
VEGETABLE			▨				BONE
BODY				▨			PLATED
CITY						▨	COURT
LIVE				▨			-PACKED
DOG'S			▨				TABLE
FIELD	▨						OUT
HOSPITAL		▨					HOUSE

CROSSWORD

Try the easy or cryptic clues, then rearrange the letters in the shaded squares for the answer. **CLUE: Disaster as most of award gets into feline pet's belly (11).**



EASY CLUES

ACROSS

6 Backbone (5)
7 Unaware (8)
10 Scrutinise (7)
11 Representation (7)
12 Essential food substance (7)
13 Invents (7)
14 Made (11)
19 Pays attention (7)
21 Impersonate (7)
23 Turned rapidly (7)
25 Nuclear energy source (7)
26 Bodily (8)
27 Egged on (5)

DOWN

1 Enormous (8)
2 Average (6)
3 Sleeps through the winter (10)
4 Lose one's temper (4)
5 Affront (6)
6 Deviate (6)
8 Most affluent (7)
9 Compressed (5)
13 Prudently (10)
15 Sewing tools (7)
16 Illustrations (8)
17 Circus performer (5)
18 Considered (6)
20 Insubstantial (6)
22 Fixed to a routine (2,1,3)
24 Dodge (4)

CRYPTIC CLUES

ACROSS

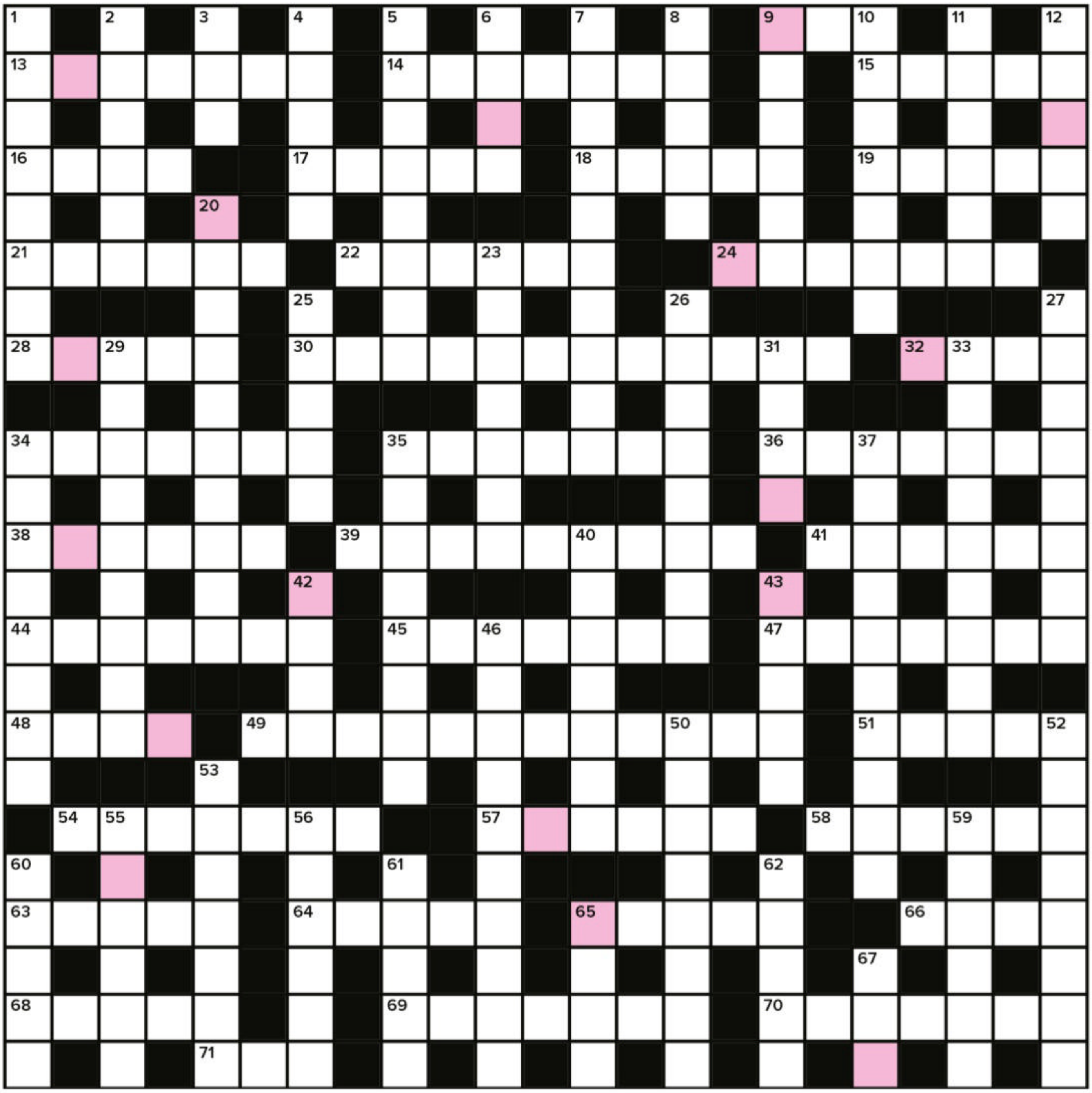
6 Courage of spies, mainly, getting tense at heart (5)
7 Before rave, go in dancing without thinking (8)
10 Look closely at overturned chopper belonging to me (7)
11 Imagine pie stuffed with bit of chicken and turkey? Not half! (7)
12 Six in the morning – about time to get home for nutritional supplement (7)
13 Makes boxes filled with earth (7)
14 Fashioned unusual trend with stucco (11)
19 Hears that Leonard and son have won first (7)
21 Ape's one friend getting to grips with IT (7)
23 Spun globe, we hear (7)
25 Greek character, nearly 22, upset by radioactive element (7)
26 Ship adjusted with clay material (8)
27 Encouraged to have cleansed without top (5)

DOWN

1 Massive concert caper! (8)
2 Psychic is mean, perhaps (6)
3 Around capitals of Italy and Switzerland, deeply dislikes winters (10)
4 Getting upset, severely criticises simple card game (4)
5 Speak unkindly about section of curtains, ultimately (6)
6 Change direction when serve's broken by Wimbledon's No. 1 (6)
8 Regularly, brain box makes you most wealthy (7)
9 Compact lair, extremely secretive (5)
13 With care around University, Tom has promise to pay – cunning! (10)
15 Mainly unnecessary taunts (7)
16 Shorten G&S sketches (8)
17 Somewhat melancholic, low – need a comedian? (5)
18 Judged me to be caught in the act (6)
20 Artful trick for the audience is trivial (6)
22 Without limitations, Tina & Ruth are bored of routine (2,1,3)
24 Bob's bird (4)

JUMBO PUZZLE

Read down the letters in the shaded squares to spell out a long-running radio programme (6,6,5).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ACROSS

9 Colourant (3)
13 Coins (7)
14 Throttling (7)
15 Midday meal (5)
16 Light haircut (4)
17 Ship's floors (5)
18 Shoe part (5)
19 Departs (5)
21 Cricket team (6)
22 Strict (6)
24 Revealing (7)
28 Centre point (5)
30 Thermal readings (12)
32 Long audible breath (4)
34 Recipe (7)
35 Compared (7)
36 Puts money in (7)
38 Relating to ethnicity (6)
39 Relying on (9)
41 Fatty oil (6)
44 Referee's item (7)
45 Dreadfully (7)
47 Frozen spikes (7)
48 Touch down (4)
49 Surprise (12)
51 Conceals (5)
54 Thoughtful (7)
57 Number of degrees in a right angle (6)
58 Powerless (6)
63 Sinks teeth into (5)
64 Matches (5)
65 Tote (5)
66 Cab (4)
68 Absolutely necessary (5)
69 White meat (7)
70 Female protagonist (7)
71 Dine (3)

DOWN

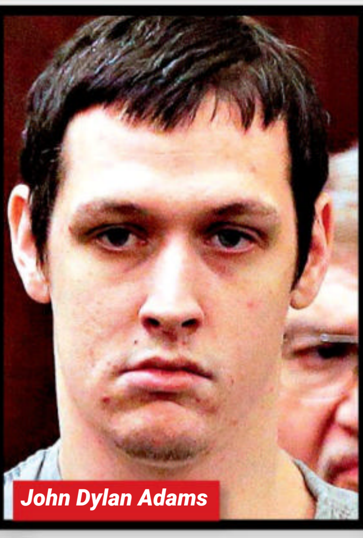
1 Against the current (8)
2 Turbine (6)
3 That man (3)
4 Stage whisper (5)
5 Semi-soft frozen dessert (3,5)
6 Throw a pancake (4)
7 Military rank (10)
8 African country (5)
9 Academic award (6)
10 Ageing (7)
11 Takeaway cuisine (6)
12 Not those! (5)
20 Place to dine (10)
23 Carry out (7)
25 Book of maps (5)
26 Without notice (8)
27 Facial hairs (8)
29 Instruction (9)
31 Wicked (4)
33 Put in place (9)
34 Goodbye (8)
35 Lift (8)
37 Applying a glossy coating (10)
40 Marine mammal (7)
42 Meshes (4)
43 Grubby (5)
46 Amity (10)
50 Gaining admission (8)
52 Sample (8)
53 Propelled weapon (7)
55 Landed property (6)
56 Requiring speedy action (6)
59 South American country (6)
60 Over (5)
61 Strike with the hand (5)
62 Legends (5)
65 Gateau (4)
67 Married woman's title (3)

You'll find the puzzle answers on pages 60-61

Into the woo

What really happened to this young nursing student?

Zachary Adams


John Dylan Adams

Jason Autry

There was no doubt student Holly Bobo, 20, would make a great nurse. Sweet and kind, she was brought up in a loving family.

Her dad Dana worked in the building trade and her mum Karen was a teacher.

Along with her brother Clint, then 25, and their dog Rascal, they lived in a rural, wooded area of Darden, Tennessee.

On 13 April 2011, Dana woke to find Holly sitting at the kitchen table, preparing for a big test later that day.

Karen made Holly a packed lunch, told her she loved her and went to work.

Later, at 7.45am, there was a scream from the house.

A neighbour phoned Karen at work to tell her.

Meanwhile, the sound of Rascal barking woke Clint.

He peered out of the window to see his sister in the garage with a man dressed in camouflage.

Thought it was Holly's boyfriend Drew and they were arguing.

After texting his mum to ask why Holly wasn't in college, Clint looked back through the window.

Then watched as they walked off together. Into the woods.

Karen called Clint straight back. He told her what he'd seen, but Karen knew Drew was out of town.

Desperate search

Instinct told her something terrible had happened, so she called the police.

'Somebody has my daughter! They've kidnapped her!' she screamed down the line.

Karen was hysterical.

A friend drove her home.

Police swarmed the house.

There was a pool of blood beside the car.

Dana raced home to a frantic scene.

As concerned neighbours appeared, everyone began scouring the area, looking for Holly.

But she was gone.

The next day, Holly's lunch box was found in a nearby creek. A piece of paper with her name on it was also found in the woods.

But there was no sign of Holly.

Hundreds of locals joined the search.

Weeks passed, then months. Then years.

Karen and Dana never stopped appealing for information. They held vigils, released balloons.

Never gave up hope of finding their girl.

Finally, after three long years, in early 2014, a breakthrough.

A witness said they saw Holly alive with two men after she'd disappeared into the woods.

They were Jason Autry, then 39, and Zachary 'Zach' Adams, 29.

The witness was Zach's younger brother John Dylan Adams, known as Dylan.

He said he'd seen Holly sitting in the living room of his brother's house on the day of the kidnapping.

Jason had been standing a few feet away.

Dylan claimed his brother was wearing green Crocs.

Alarm bells rang – a Crocs footprint had been found on the Bobos' property.

Gruesome finds

Both men were charged with aggravated kidnapping and murder.

Reports suggested Zach threatened his brother from prison, saying he'd 'be in the hole beside her' if he didn't 'shut his mouth'.

But there was still no sign of a body.

Until, on 7 September 2014, a gruesome discovery was made.

Out in the woods, a man found a human skull under a bucket and called the police.

Searching the area, they uncovered teeth and ribs.

All belonging to Holly.

Finally, she had been found.

Hundreds of volunteers joined the search

ds

YOU'RE THE JUDGE!

Dana sitting in the courtroom, below an image of his daughter

'We've lost a precious daughter, sister, granddaughter, niece, cousin and friend,' attorney Steve Farese said in a statement issued by the Bobo family.

That month, Dylan, then 26, was charged with tampering with evidence.

Zach and Jason were later additionally charged with rape.

And eventually Dylan was also charged with kidnap, rape and murder.

Before the case reached court, Jason agreed to testify against Zach in the hope of leniency.

Shocking details

Finally, in September 2017, Zachary Adams, then 33, was the first to stand trial.

He pleaded not guilty.

Jason was the prosecution's key witness.

He told the court that Zach said to him, 'I need you to help me bury this body.'

Claimed Zach said he and his brother had drugged and raped Holly.

Prosecutors said Holly was still alive when Zach prepared to dump her body.

That she'd been wrapped in a blanket in his truck when he sought help from Jason.

But when they were about to throw her into a river, she made a sound and moved her foot. So Zach had shot her in the head.

Jason claimed they then put her back in the car when they heard a boat coming.

And that Zach later told him he 'threw her out'.

Prosecutor Paul Hagerman said Zach boasted about the crime, saying he 'couldn't have picked a prettier b***h. It was fun. The world may never know what happened to Holly Bobo.'

And a former girlfriend testified that he had threatened to tie her up 'like he did Holly Bobo'.

However, Jennifer Thompson, for the defence, argued that there was no solid evidence against Zach.

'Zach Adams never raped Holly Bobo. He never killed her. He never met her. He never even laid eyes on her,' she said.

She told the court that Dylan had a low IQ, and his statements implicating his brother didn't add up.

And Zach's phone was shown to be elsewhere, by a lake, that day.

With no physical evidence, was Zach really responsible for what happened to Holly Bobo?

The jury would decide...

Karen and Dana, soon after Holly's abduction

Guilty or not? Turn to find out ▶▶▶

WORDS: ANNA MATHESON. PHOTOS: ALAMY

Zachary Adams wants a retrial

John Dylan Adams accepted a deal

Jason Autry pleaded guilty

WHAT'S THE VERDICT?

GUILTY

On 22 September 2017, Zachary Adams, then 33, was found guilty of the kidnap, rape and murder of Holly Bobo. An agreement between the defence and prosecution meant he avoided the death penalty. He was sentenced to life plus 50 years without parole.

Justice for Holly at last.

'She was the sweetest soul I have ever known,' Holly's mum Karen said in court. She called Holly's killer an 'animal' who showed 'no remorse'.

In January 2018, John Dylan Adams entered an Alford plea – meaning that while he did not admit guilt, he agreed to accept the consequences of a guilty verdict. He was sentenced to 15 years for facilitation of first-degree murder and 35 years for especially aggravated kidnap, to serve concurrently.

Finally, in September 2020, Jason Autry pleaded guilty to facilitation of especially aggravated kidnapping and solicitation to commit first-degree murder. He was sentenced to eight years.

The case was closed.

But in February 2024, Jason made the shocking claim that his testimony had been fictional. And in March 2025, Zach Adams was back in court, requesting a retrial. While a previous appeal was denied, the judge's decision on the latest application is yet to be made.

For Holly's family, it's another painful blow.

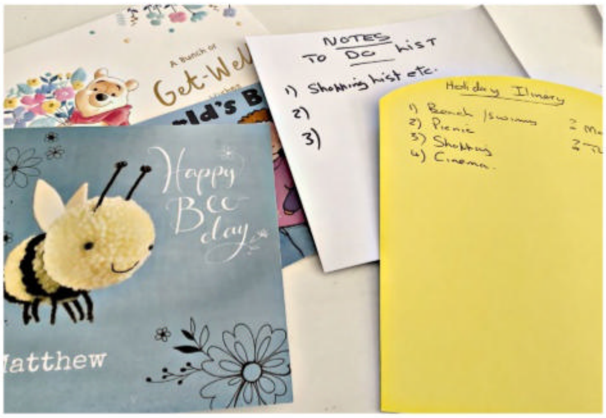
PHOTOS: ALAMY

Blim

Play your cards right

Rather than binning old birthday cards, cut off the front sections and use them as lovely 'to-do' pads for writing lists and ideas. Cards are so expensive now, it's good to get two uses out of them.

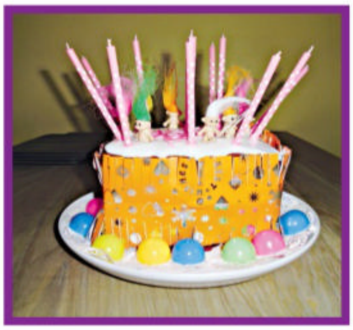
Margaret Soley-Greensill, Macduff, Aberdeenshire

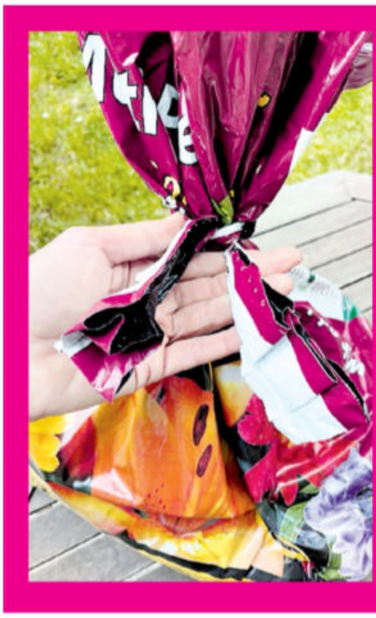


Star baker

If you need some inspiration when decorating a children's birthday cake, use gift wrap for the frill and raid a 20p machine for the characters. Cheap but very cheerful!

Linda Keen, Sheffield





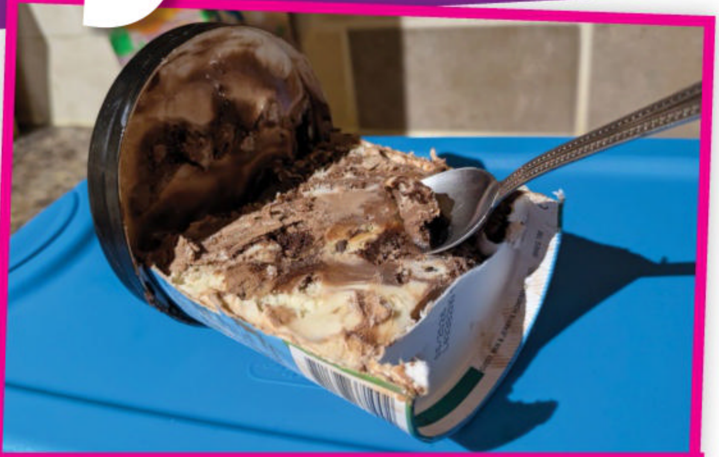
Down to earth

To stop half-used compost bags from spilling out onto your lawn, cut straight across the top of the bag and use the discarded strip to tie around the middle. It keeps the compost sealed and fresh for your next gardening session.

Annie Weston, Uckfield, East Sussex

ey

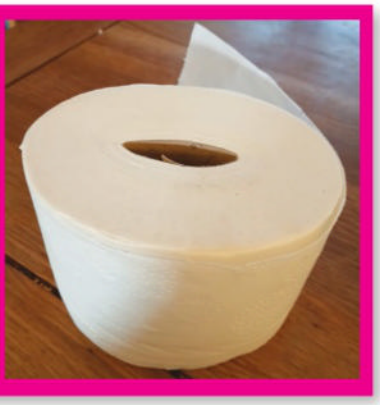
Your tips are genius!



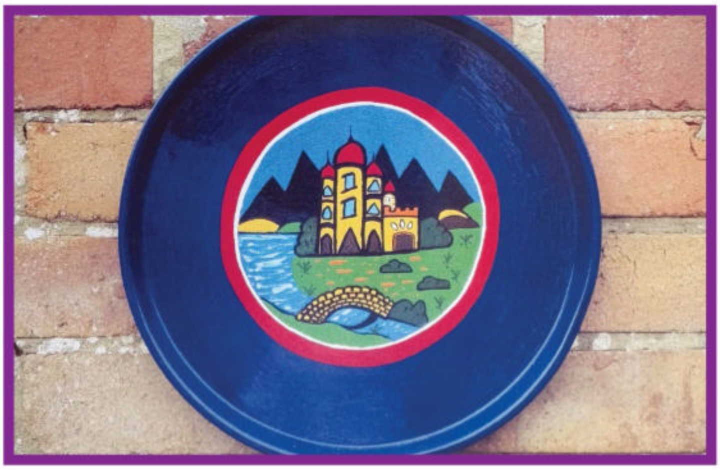
Sundae best

To share our ice cream, I cut the tub in half. It saves on the washing-up as we can use the tub half as a bowl.
Kirsty McLean, Hull

Roll with it

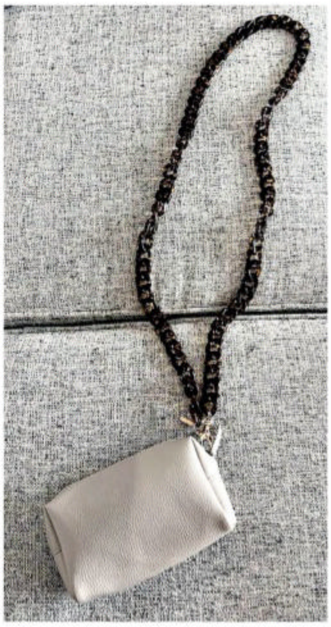


I squash all my toilet rolls! That way, when the children pull on them, they only get two or three sheets instead of loads coming away in one go.
Claire Cross, Surrey



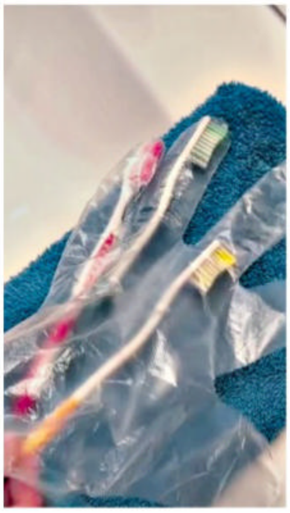
Whatever floats your boat

I love canalware artwork. When I found an old tray, I decided to give it a makeover by painting it in that style. It looked lovely on my patio wall.
Carol Loader, Taunton



Bags of style

I didn't have an evening bag for my partner's recent work event, so I got one of his old toiletry bags and attached my chunky chain mobile strap. I received lots of compliments about its uniqueness.
Beverley Lindfield, Hextable, Kent



Finger tips

When you're going on holiday, an easy way to take and travel with toothbrushes is to put them in a plastic glove. It keeps all the brushes separate and protected and you can roll it up and put into your toiletries bag.
Zowie Kater, Southampton

You butter believe it!

When you're staying at a hotel and using the toast machine at breakfast, pop the hard butter on the top. The heat will soften it and make it easier to spread.
Emma Talland, St Albans

Lakeland
DAIRIES
Pure Irish Butter
SALTED

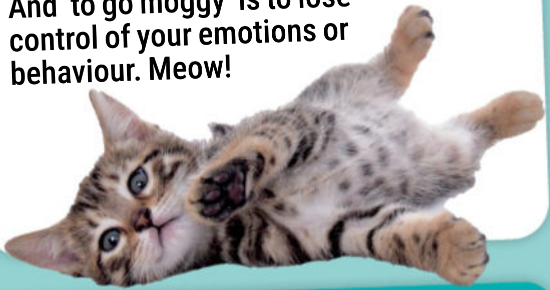
Remember, these are YOUR tips – we haven't tried them ourselves

Word up!

Stuck on what to say? Try these words that have recently been added to the dictionary

Moggy

If someone calls you a moggy, they're probably not comparing you to their pet cat. Especially if they're from South Africa. It means you're extremely irrational and out of touch with reality. And 'to go moggy' is to lose control of your emotions or behaviour. Meow!



Sharp-sharp

Gone are the days when a simple hello would suffice. Sharp-sharp is a South African term to casually greet someone, while also complimenting their style. Or to simply tell them how generally fantastic they are. Sharp-sharp, all of you lovely *Chat* readers!

Gigil

'Look at their little face, I could just eat them up!' If that's your response to a cute kitten, puppy or baby, then add gigil to your vocab. Taken from the Philippines Tagalog language, gigil is a 'feeling so intense that it gives us the irresistible urge to tightly clench our hands, grit our teeth and squeeze whatever it is we find so adorable'. Don't actually do that though…

CR

We've all seen WC plastered on public bathrooms, but hands up if it took you an embarrassing amount of time to realise that it actually stands for 'water closet'? Well now there are even more letters to get your head spinning faster than a toilet flush. CR – or comfort room – is yet another word for bathroom. Can't we just stick with bog?

Alamak

The Malay word alamak has been spoken in Malaysia and Singapore since the dawn of time, but has now officially reached UK soil. Meaning surprise, shock, dismay or outrage, next time you feel an 'OMG!' brewing, try using alamak instead. And see if anyone knows what you're on about.

WORDS: FRANCES LEATE. PHOTOS: GETTY

Ludraman

While it's true that the Irish are known for the gift of the gab, they also know how to give the perfect insult. So if you're ever called a ludraman, be ready with a good comeback because it means a lazy, unproductive and stupid person. Way harsh, Tai!

Morto

Another Irish gem. A great shortening of the word mortified – perfect for when you're feeling extremely embarrassed. And it's only a matter of time before other words and phrases people love to abbreviate get a mention. Got any contenders?

Acting the maggot

Craic, class, grand, banjaxed… Now the Irish have outdone themselves with this turn of phrase. Acting the maggot means to act or behave foolishly or to behave in a playful or silly way. Charming!

Read the rest

All these words and phrases, plus 34 more, were added to the Oxford English Dictionary earlier this year. You can check out other new additions at oed.com.

Receiving my bravery award

Don't with

I only popped to the shop but came face to face wit

Mairi Kerin, 42, West Midlands

Adrenaline coursed through me as I high-kicked into the air. 'Remember your form,' my sensei ordered.

It was 2009, and after eight years of training, karate kicks were second nature to me.

I'd signed up for classes aged 19, at university, wanting to spend more time with a boy I fancied.

Instead of falling in love with him, I fell in love with the martial art.

I gained a yellow belt, then orange, all the way through to brown…

Now 27, there was just one belt left.

'Congratulations,' my sensei beamed as my grading came to an end.

As he handed me a black belt, I was over the moon. I'd achieved the highest ranking!

I continued practising six days a week, alongside my job as an engineer.

In 2018, I became a part-time coach at the University of Birmingham.

Even came close to qualifying for the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics.

More often than not, you'd find me in my karate kit with bare feet.

But in March 2023, I got a new engineering job in an office-based role.

I'd spent the past three years working from home in my comfies.

'I need a whole new wardrobe,' I told my sister Sarah over the phone.

That weekend, I hit the high street and picked out some office wear and a pair of ankle boots.

Brown leather with a block heel, they were stiff.

They'll be OK when I've broken them in, I thought.

So on 3 March, when I popped out to see Sarah, I thought I'd slip them on to help soften them up.

It's a while since I wore shoes with a heel, I thought as I tottered to the car.

Halfway to Sarah's, I stopped by a shop to get chocolate for my nieces.

Clip-clopping across the car park, I spotted a man outside dressed in black with his face covered by a scarf.

Odd, I thought. *Perhaps he has a bike nearby.*

Shrugging it off, I stepped inside and said hello to the shopkeeper.

Grabbing some chocolates, I plonked them on the counter.

But the sound of the door opening made me glance up.

It was the man from outside, face still covered.

He came over, standing behind me as if he was queueing. But he was holding a black bag.

I sensed trouble…

'What are you doing?' the shopkeeper asked.

'I'm going to take all your money,' the man responded.

Not on my watch!

In a split second, I assessed him – and noticed his pockets looked heavy.

Realising he could be carrying a weapon, my karate training kicked in.

Realising he could have a weapon, my training kicked in

As the wannabe robber lifted his arm to shove the black bag towards the shopkeeper, I grabbed it and held it down.

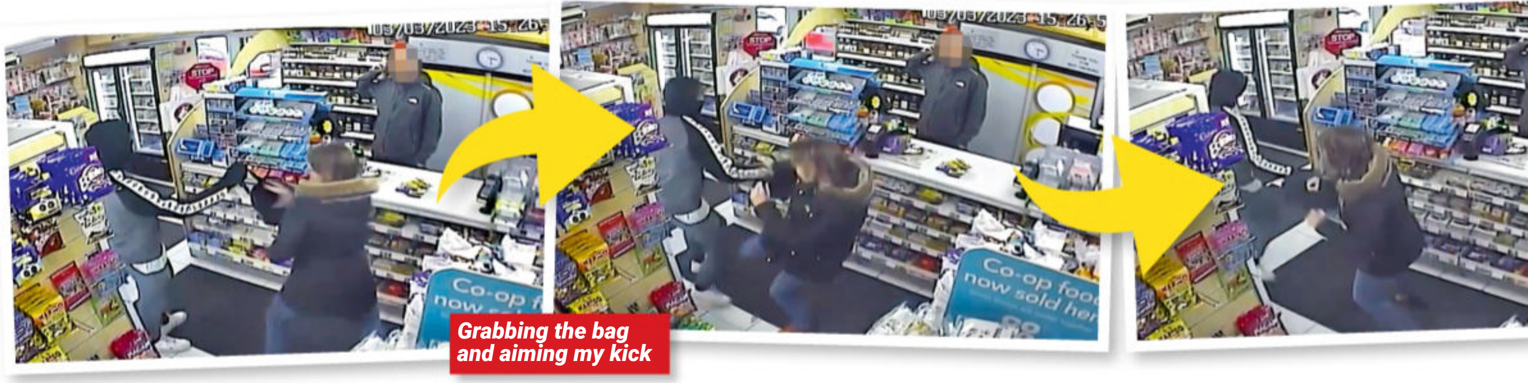
Then I aimed a heel-clad foot at his shins. Hard.

'What the…' the would-be-robber choked.

I braced myself for a return jab but he just fled.

Empty handed.

I chased him to the door and he stumbled away into the distance.



Grabbing the bag and aiming my kick

'SARAH' IS NOT HER REAL NAME. WORDS: ASHLEIGH PAGE, KATIE PEARSON.
PHOTOS: SOPHIE PECK/SWNS, SWNS, WEST MERCIA POLICE/SWNS

mess
Mairi

for some chocs
h a yob

Karate is my passion

'W-what just happened?' the shopkeeper stammered.

'I think you were being robbed,' I told him.

The shopkeeper was shaken, so I helped him call the police, then took out my purse to pay for the chocs.

'No, please, you take them!' he said.

Back in the car, I felt shaky.

'I just stopped a robbery,' I told Sarah, arriving at hers.

'What were you thinking?' she gasped.

Handing her the chocolates, I realised that I should go back to the shop and speak to the police.

Pulling up outside, police cars surrounded the store.

'There's the woman who helped me,' the shopkeeper said, pointing at me.

I gave a statement.

Police revealed there'd been a series of robberies carried out in the area.

And the whole thing had been caught on CCTV.

Watching the footage, I couldn't believe it was me.

'I look like John Wayne,' I laughed, taking in my stance as I swaggered back to the counter. 'I guess that's what happens when you do karate in heels!'

Eventually, three people were arrested and charged in relation to the robberies.

In March 2024, Jordan Hickman, then 29, appeared at Shrewsbury Crown Court, where he was found guilty of conspiracy to commit robbery and conspiracy to commit burglary.

Jake Jones, then 21, and an 18-year-old, who could not be named for legal reasons, pleaded guilty to related offences at an earlier hearing.

As well as the shop, they'd targeted charities, barbers, bookies and takeaways.

In total, they'd stolen £1,800 in a two-week spree.

CCTV showed they had been carrying weapons, including a firearm.

I'd fought off a gunman!

In June 2024, Hickman was sentenced to 11 years, while Jones was given four years. The third man received three years and nine months.

I thought that was it, over.

Then West Mercia Police sent me an email, saying they wanted to award me for my 'heroic bravery'.

And in January 2025, my family and my karate instructor cheered as I was presented with a Police Chief Superintendent Commendation Award.

'Thank you for your bravery,' chief superintendent Edd Williams smiled.

Since that time, the clip of me fighting off the criminal was released and has gone viral.

Don't get between a woman and her chocolate, one comment read, which made me laugh.

I've spent years honing my karate skills and mastering the art of self-defence.

I just never thought my secret weapon would be a pair of heels!

Chasing the man out the door

Jake Jones

Jordan Hickman

ASK Aunty Nelly

Our Antonella tells it how it is

Cover for jailbird dad?

Q My dad got sent down a couple of months back – dodgy dealings at work. But Mum's telling everyone he's working abroad.

I hate it – why should I have to lie for the family name? I did nothing wrong!

I love my dad but he messed up, and now I'm stuck covering for him.

Do I carry on lying to protect Mum, or be honest and cause chaos?

Maddie, 29

A You're right to say you're not the keeper of your dad's bad choices, love. And you don't need to cover for him.

There's a middle ground here. No need to lie to those you're closest to. But you don't need to shout it from the rooftops, either.

If people ask, just say you haven't spoken to your dad recently. If your mum insists on continuing to live in delusion, that's up to her.

Fight over furniture

Q My girlfriend and I are rowing over a new sofa.

I want cream – clean, simple, won't go out of fashion. She wants green. Loud green.

She says it's got 'personality'. I've told her it looks like something you'd find in a bingo hall!

Now we're barely talking and it's turned into a full-on stand-off over a flipping settee.

Do I let her have her way or stand my ground?

Duncan, 42

A If the biggest argument you've got is over a sofa, you're lucky, petal!

But it sounds like you're both stubborn and both want your own way.

You've got to compromise.

Could you get a bright sofa and neutralise it with throws and cushions? Or vice versa?

It's not about giving in, it's about finding a solution you can both live with.

Let's not go to pieces over polyester, love.

Retired and alone

Q I retired last year and was really looking forward to a life of leisure.

But now it's arrived, I've never felt so alone.

My friends are all busy with grandchildren, but I don't have any. And my partner passed away in 2019.

Life is too quiet for me. I miss having a purpose.

How do I find meaning again at this stage of life?

Sally, 67

A Well done for admitting you feel lonely, flower. We all do sometimes, but it's flipping hard to own up to.

You're feeling like the party is over for you.

But there are other parties out there, ready and waiting.

Pottery, a choir, a social club, adopting a pet?

You could even join a dating app if you feel ready.

Soon you'll be so busy, you'll be begging for peace and quiet!

I'm not their father!

Q My flatmate's girlfriend is around all the time with her two young kids.

I end up making their breakfast, taking them to school and playing with them in the park.

Last week the little one even called me 'Dad'.

My flatmate thinks it's hilarious but I don't. I'm only 24.

How do I back out without upsetting the kids?

Callum, 24

A You didn't sign up to be this woman's childcare. And it's her little ones who are going to suffer.

You need to lay down some clear boundaries.

Step back and refuse to watch them for her any longer.

You can still play the odd game of football in the park, but I think it's better for everyone if you create some distance there. This isn't fair on you or her kids.

Secret love for bestie

Q I've been best friends with a girl for five years. Problem is, I've been in love with her for the last two.

She recently broke up with her boyfriend and I've been helping her through it, but it's getting harder to hide my feelings.

I want to tell her how I feel, but I'm scared.

Do I risk ruining our friendship by being honest with her?

Lauren, 25

A You're not the first to fall for a best friend, and you won't be the last, love. Fessing up could either be the start of a relationship that ends, or she might not feel the same.

Especially if you've no reason to believe that your friend is attracted to women.

On the other hand, it could be the start of something beautiful, petal.

It's up to you to decide if it's worth the risk.

I'm stuck in a huge lie

Q I made a fake dating profile where I lied about something huge.

I thought it'd help weed out shallow people.

Only then, I ended up meeting someone amazing.

We've been seeing each other for months, and I've never felt this way before.

If I tell the truth, I lose her. And if I don't, I'm lying to someone I love.

Dean, 41

A You're being so mysterious. But whatever whopper you told, now's the time to own up and accept the consequences.

You deserve to be with someone who loves the real you.

Maybe she'll understand why you did it and look past it.

If not, then you've learned a harsh lesson.

The truth always comes out in the end, sweetheart.

Don't try to build a relationship on lies.

Should I stay or go?

Q My partner has just told me that they're trans.

They've known for years and now want to start hormones.

They say they still love me and want us to stay together.

And I do love them too, but I'm grieving the person I thought I knew.

Right now, I'm feeling so confused and lost.

Is it selfish to admit I'm struggling?

Emma, 35

A You're not selfish at all, my love. You're only human, and this is a big life change.

My advice is don't try to hide it, hun.

Your partner was honest with you, so you owe the same to them.

Only you can choose if you can make this work, but you can give it a try.

Love can get you through a lot.

In with a bad crowd

Q My 14-year-old daughter has recently started hanging out with a new group at school. I'm worried that they're a bad influence.

We used to be close and I thought she could tell me anything.

Now my girl has become secretive and rude, and I've found vape pens in her bag.

I want to confront her, but I'm scared I'll push her away.

I'm at a total loss!

Carrie, 49

A It sounds like you've got yourself a teenager, flower! They can be a handful.

Don't 'confront' her. Screaming and door slamming won't help.

Instead, have a calm chat.

Remind her you love her and you're not mad, just worried.

Tell her stories of daft mistakes you made as a teen.

She might not listen straight away, but she'll always remember that you met her with love.

FACEBOOK.COM/ANTONELLAUNCENSORED. INSTAGRAM.COM/ANTONELLAUNCENSORED. NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED. AUNTY NELLY PHOTO: PHILIPPA GRACE PHOTOGRAPHY. PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY

Sexu heal

Our love life was non- until I made a big cha

Hannah Gibson, 44, Crawley, West Sussex

Me and Lee were married in 2005

In the Maldives for our 20th anniversary

Standing in a nightclub in East Grinstead, I swigged a blue WKD as a bloke caught my eye.

Dressed in a white T-shirt and with jet-black hair, he had a really cheeky smile.

What a shame he was with another girl!

It was July 2001 and I was out with my friend when the girl he'd been standing with walked over to me.

'My mate thinks you're beautiful,' she told me, pointing back to the bloke I'd been looking at.

Really? Me?

At first I wondered if it was a wind-up.

See, I was more used to men mocking my size than eyeing me up.

Cursed with a big appetite, I'd been the chubbiest girl in class at school, and a target for bullies.

Now 20, I'd managed to lose a bit and was feeling trim at 10st 10lb in my size 14 outfit.

Still, I wasn't used to hot men giving me compliments!

That night I chatted with Lee over the music, then outside waiting for a taxi we had a snog.

Turns out the girl he was out with was just his friend, not a girlfriend!

The next day we met at a pub for a drink and quickly became inseparable.

Cheeky, funny and kind, Lee worked away all week as a combustion engineer.

But once he was back we spent all weekends together.

Going out every night, boozy lunches with friends in the day.

And by July 2004 we'd moved into our first house together.

Everything was amazing, including our sex life.

When we married in May 2005 I was 12 weeks pregnant and 13½st.

My size 16 wedding dress had to be let out by 8in on both sides.

I didn't mind, though.

'Eating for two now,' I winked, helping myself to more cake.

After Olivia was born, we went on to have Emily in January 2008 and Jack in April 2011.

As our family got bigger, Lee and I were just as in love as ever.

But something else was growing too. Me!

The weight I gained during each pregnancy stayed put.

And looking after three little ones meant I just grabbed food on the go.

Takeaways, microwave meals, ready-made sarnies...

Before I knew it I was 19st. And I felt every last pound.

'I don't fancy going out tonight,' I'd moan to Lee, when he suggested it.

I'd prefer a cosy night in front of the telly.

With snacks, of course.

'Whatever makes you happy,' Lee would say, but he worried about me.

Our sex life dried up too.

> **Lee was lucky if we got frisky once a month**

Lee was lucky if we got frisky once a month.

Then in December 2021 I was at home with the kids when Lee came in from work looking worried.

'Someone at the office has Covid-19,' he said.

We'd so far managed to dodge the virus through the worst of the pandemic.

'I'm worried that if you catch it, it could kill you,' he added.

It was a known fact that being overweight put you more at risk.

Seeing the concern on Lee's face hit me hard and I burst into tears.

'You're right, I need to do something,' I cried.

Later, as I scrolled through Instagram, I saw an old colleague had lost 8st with The 1:1 Diet by Cambridge Weight Plan.

I decided to sign up.

'I've got nothing to lose – just a lot of weight,' I joked at my very first session in January 2022.

Stepping onto the scales, I held my breath as the number crept up to 21st 7lb.

My face burned hot with shame.

Back home, I got started with the meal-replacement packets of soups and shakes.

It wasn't hard though, even when I made dinners for Lee and the kids, sat with

I'm half the size I once was!

WORDS: RACHEL TOMPKINS, MATTHEW BARBOUR

ual ing

-existent, nge

My weight had crept up over the years

Now I've lost 12st and feel better than ever

them as they tucked in.

I was determined and it paid off.

By June I'd dropped down to 15st 11lb and a size 18.

I had so much more energy, I started the Couch to 5k fitness programme.

Every morning, I'd put on my running shoes and pound the pavements.

Slowly at first. Then faster and faster.

In February 2023, Lee was there to cheer as I finished the Brighton Half Marathon.

What a difference a year makes!

To celebrate, Lee and I flew to New York for a little getaway without the kids.

At 13st 10lb and a slim size 14, I loved donning a fitted dress for dinner in a fancy restaurant.

And things heated up in the bedroom, too.

Feeling more confident than I had in years, Lee and I couldn't keep our hands off each other.

Back at home, I continued with the 1:1 Diet plan and by October 2024 I'd slimmed down to 10st.

Losing so much weight meant lots of saggy skin.

'I've worked too hard to feel self-conscious again,' I said to Lee.

So I dipped into savings and paid £25,000 to have an op where the excess skin was removed at a private clinic in Bournemouth.

Now, at 9st 5lb, I've lost 12st and I'm healthier and happier than ever.

And Lee can't get enough of me.

'You'd look great in this,' he winked, sending me a link to a saucy see-through body suit.

Without telling him, I ordered it.

And when it arrived, I snuck upstairs to put it on, then called Lee to bed.

When he saw me, his eyes almost popped out of his head.

'You look gorgeous,' he said.

Recently, when we celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary in the Maldives, we hardly left the bedroom.

When we did, I proudly showed myself off in a size 8 bikini.

'Your bum looks fantastic,' Lee flirted, wolf-whistling.

With the kids more grown up, we're like giddy teens again.

I feel so lucky to have a hubby like Lee.

He's loved me and fancied me through thick and thin – quite literally.

Now that I love myself back, our marriage has had a total reboot.

What can I say, we fancy the pants off each other!

BRIGHTON 10K
BRIGHTON & HOVE AC
PB!
DING-A-LING
35

My fitness has improved too

Just for fun PUZZLES!

THE BIG QUIZ

The answers to all but one of these quiz questions can be found hidden in this wordsearch grid, reading forwards, backwards, up, down or diagonally. To help you, we'll tell you that the answers are in alphabetical order in each section. However, one answer can't be found in the grid. This is your puzzle answer.

L	S	K	A	T	E	B	O	A	R	D	I	N	G	B	K
O	E	G	D	E	H	E	H	T	R	E	V	O	L	R	C
O	Q	H	G	U	O	R	O	B	N	E	T	T	A	D	A
P	B	A	R	N	E	S	A	S	V	B	C	C	A	S	H
R	H	B	G	C	E	T	I	I	D	F	E	P	E	L	S
E	V	M	S	D	A	H	L	A	K	D	P	L	N	F	Y
V	R	O	N	R	D	G	L	P	P	C	B	D	L	E	D
I	M	A	I	B	N	E	B	U	C	B	P	H	B	M	D
L	O	I	R	I	H	N	L	P	I	J	C	J	J	D	A
A	I	V	O	P	F	V	S	R	V	A	B	B	T	O	C
K	H	G	N	S	O	U	T	H	A	M	E	R	I	C	A

CAPYBARA

1 By what name is the young of rodents such as capybaras, gerbils and guinea pigs known? (3)

2 The 2014 sequel to which 2011 animated film features a capybara named Claira, a macaw named Blu and a canary named Nico? (3)

3 The largest living rodent, the capybara, is native to which continent? (5,7)

GUINEA PIG

4 Despite their name, guinea pigs originated in which South American mountain range, stretching from Venezuela to Argentina? (5)

5 Which Richard starred in the 1948 film *The Guinea Pig*, the 1963 film *The Great Escape*, and directed the 1982 film *Gandhi*? (12)

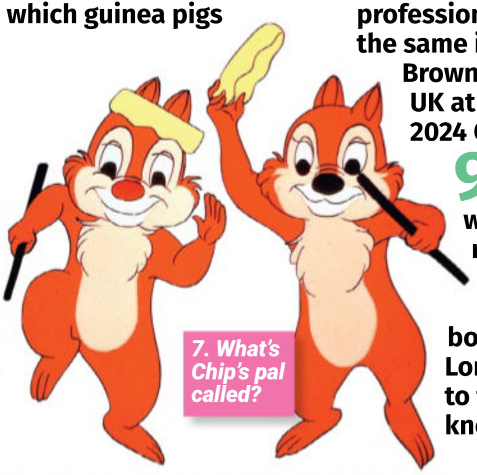
6 An Ellis Parker Butler story, *Pigs Is Pigs*, in which guinea pigs breed uncontrollably at a railway station, inspired the *Star Trek* episode *The Trouble with _*? (8)

CHIPMUNK

7 What is the name of the companion to the Walt Disney animated chipmunk Chip, their two names being reminiscent of an 18th-century English cabinet maker? (4)

8 Jason Lee, star of the film *Alvin and the Chipmunks*, is a former professional in which sport, the same in which Sky Brown competed for the UK at the 2020 and 2024 Olympics? (13)

9 Jahmaal Noel Fyffe, a rapper with the stage name Chip (formerly Chipmunk), was born in which north London town, home to the football club known as Spurs? (9)



7. What's Chip's pal called?

GOPHER

10 Which former US video games company's 2600 console, released in 1977, ran games such as Gopher, Frogger, Pitfall! and Pac-Man? (5)

11 A gopher dancing to the Kenny Loggins song *I'm Alright* ends which 1980 comedy starring Chevy Chase, Rodney Dangerfield and Bill Murray? (10)

12 Which BBC children's programme, which ran from 1987 to 1993, featured Gordon the Gopher and Double Dare, Live Line and Press Conference segments? (5,4)

11. A film with a dancing gopher

PORCUPINE

13 Which Julian wrote *The Porcupine*, *Flaubert's Parrot* and *Arthur & George*, a 2015 TV adaptation of which featured Martin Clunes as Arthur Conan Doyle? (6)

14 The Searchers, Cast and Echo & the Bunnymen (who released the 1983 album *Porcupine*) all formed in which city? (9)

15 Raccoon RJ, box turtle Verne and porcupines Lou and Penny all feature in which 2006 animated heist comedy film? (4,3,5)

Your answer ________________

PHOTOS: ALAMY

You'll find the puzzle answers on pages 60-61

Health

The advice you need

Cool as a cucumber: Lewis with his baby bro

Lewis saves the day

True-life PATIENT CASEBOOK

Big brothers really are superheroes in our house

Natasha Smith, 39, Alvaston, Derbyshire

It was one of my favourite scenes. The whole family sitting around the table, peacefully tucking into dinner.

In April this year my partner Steve, then 48, and my sons Lewis, 15, and Lyndon, 2, fell quiet as they enjoyed their chicken, rice, houmous and cucumber.

Lewis had always loved his grub and Lyndon was growing into a good eater, too.

Suddenly, Lewis broke the contented silence.

'Mum, Lyndon's gone red in the face,' he said. 'I think he might be choking.'

I jumped up, rushing round to Lyndon's chair.

He was making straining noises and looking scared.

'What do we do?' Steve panicked.

I was flapping too. I put my fingers down Lyndon's throat, hoping to dislodge whatever was stuck.

'Mum, don't do that,' Lewis said. 'You'll make him sick.'

Cool as anything, he explained.

'He might breathe his sick in and choke on that, too,' he said.

Meanwhile, Lyndon's face was growing redder, his choking noises getting louder.

What if he died while we watched on, helpless?

Suddenly, Lewis scooped his little bro out of his high chair.

Tipped him over the table and began hammering at his back with the palm of his hand.

Giving him blows upwards.

Steve and I watched, holding our breath, as Lewis gave five blows.

On the fifth, a bit of cucumber came flying out of Lyndon's mouth and landed on the table.

Lyndon gasped for air and started to babble as he hugged his brother.

I'd never been more relieved to hear him!

The cucumber had been cut into bite-sized pieces.

But the houmous Lyndon had dipped it into had made it sticky and it had lodged in his throat.

Cuddling them both to my chest, my heart was racing.

'Where did you learn how to do that, Lewis?' I asked, still in shock.

'We just learnt first aid at Army Cadets,' he shrugged.

Lewis has always been very chilled. So laid-back.

He'd been going to Army Cadets for three years and, thanks to his training, he'd been able to keep calm and save his brother's life.

His cool-headed approach had stopped Lyndon from panicking, too.

I was so proud of my boy.

And grateful to the people who'd trained him.

> **What if he died while we watched on, helpless?**

I texted his cadet officer Julie to tell her all about it.

'That's amazing,' she said.

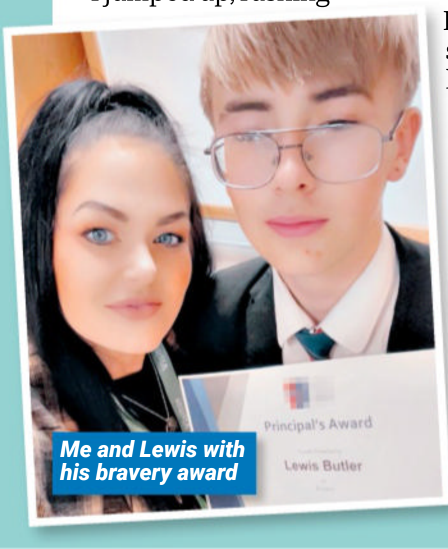
'What if Lewis hadn't been there?' I later fretted to Steve.

It was a wake-up call and it spurred me on to get some proper first-aid training.

Lewis has had a letter from Army Cadets congratulating him, and the school has given him a bravery award.

We still have family dinners and Lyndon still loves cucumbers.

He's here because of his big bro. Lewis is Lyndon's hero, and mine too.



Me and Lewis with his bravery award

My little one's in safe hands

Find out more

Learn about Army Cadet first-aid training by visiting armycadets.com/what-we-do/army-cadet-syllabus/first-aid.

Turn over for more health

WORDS: ANNA MATHESON

ASK Dr Dallas

Dr Elise Dallas is a GP whose expertise you can trust

Nose woes

Q My 12-year-old daughter keeps having nosebleeds that are tricky to stop. What should I do?
Kelly, Brecon

A Frequent nosebleeds in a 12-year-old can be concerning. Firstly, keep your daughter hydrated as dry nasal passages can trigger nosebleeds. Use a humidifier, especially in dry weather, and apply a thin layer of petroleum jelly inside the nostrils to keep them moist. Encourage your daughter not to pick her nose or blow it forcefully.

If it persists, consult your GP to rule out issues like sinus problems, allergies or blood-clotting disorders. They may recommend nasal sprays or cream, or cauterisation if necessary to seal off the affected blood vessels.

Can I help him last longer?

Q My boyfriend ejaculates almost as soon as he goes inside me. He says he's so turned on, but how can I calm him down?
Pippa, Newbury

A Premature ejaculation (PE) is a common sexual issue that occurs when a man ejaculates sooner than desired. It can be influenced by many factors, including his body, mind and environment. But talking about it can help to reduce anxiety, which may be part of the problem.

Try the start-stop technique – encourage him to pause when he feels close to coming – to gain control over arousal. You can also try gently squeezing the base of the penis to help delay ejaculation.

Encourage him to engage in activities that improve sexual health, such as exercise, stress reduction and pelvic floor exercises. Seek counselling if needed. Patience, understanding and a supportive approach are crucial in addressing this issue.

Lingering symptoms

Q I gave up smoking 18 months ago after smoking 20 a day for 30 years. I still have a cough and a sticky substance on my teeth – will it ever go away?
Shelly, Worcester

A Congratulations on quitting! The cough is called 'smoker's cough' and it's your body's way of getting rid of the mucus and debris caused by cigarettes. It may take time to go away, but it means your lungs are healing. To reduce stickiness on your teeth, brush twice a day, floss daily and see your dentist regularly.

Everyone's experience after stopping smoking is different. Some may have no more symptoms, while others may still have some. If your cough or sticky teeth don't improve, see a doctor. Stay smoke-free and keep up the good work.

THIS INFORMATION IS NOT INTENDED TO SUBSTITUTE PROFESSIONAL MEDICAL ADVICE AND SHOULD NOT BE RELIED ON AS HEALTH OR PERSONAL ADVICE. NEVER DISREGARD PROFESSIONAL ADVICE OR DELAY SEEKING IT. ALWAYS CONSULT YOUR PHARMACIST OR GP FOR GUIDANCE. IN AN EMERGENCY, CALL 999 AND SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP IMMEDIATELY

Help! I found a lump

Q I discovered a hard lump deep in my vagina while checking for a tampon. I'm anxious because I don't know how long it's been there.
Bea, Reigate

A It's understandable to be concerned, but stay calm and book an appointment with your GP as soon as you can. They can examine you to find the cause. It could be a variety of things, including a cyst, a benign growth, a forgotten tampon, or even your cervix (the neck of your womb), which can be felt deep inside and will feel like a firm lump. However, your doctor will give a proper diagnosis and recommend any necessary treatment. Remember, many vaginal lumps are benign and easily treatable.

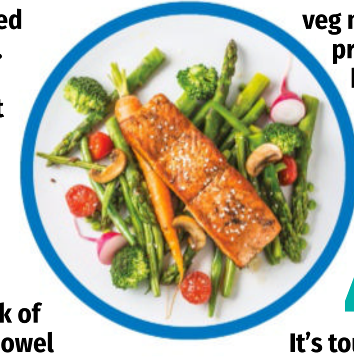
FOCUS ON... Bowel cancer

Here's how to lower your chance of developing the fourth most common cancer in the UK

1 Switch your protein

Aim to get your protein fix from beans, eggs, fish, poultry and tofu, and eat no more than three portions of red meat a week.

'There's evidence that eating lots of red meat, such as beef, lamb, pork and goat, is linked to an increased risk of developing bowel cancer,' says Claire Coughlan, clinical lead at Bowel Cancer UK*.



2 Check your meat

If you cut just one thing out of your diet, make it processed meat. That means anything preserved by smoking, curing, salting or preservatives.

'Almost 13% of bowel cancer cases in 2015 were linked to eating processed meat – for example, bacon, ham and sausages,' says Claire.

3 Eat more fibre

We should have 30g of fibre a day, but most of us only eat around 18g, which is bad news for bowels. 'Fibre keeps everything moving through your digestive system and is an important part of a bowel-healthy diet, as well as reducing your risk of bowel cancer,' says Claire.

She recommends eating more wholegrain pasta and bread, beans, nuts, seeds, pulses and porridge, as well as fruit and veg. 'Fruit and veg may also help protect against bowel cancer as they contain antioxidants which delay or prevent cell damage.'

4 Give up smoking

It's tough, but you're doing your health a massive favour if you quit.

'Almost 7% of bowel cancer cases are linked to smoking and we know that smokers are more likely to develop polyps (non-cancerous growths in the bowel) which could turn into cancer if not discovered,' says Claire.

5 Be more active

Keeping fit can prevent all sorts of diseases and conditions, including cancer. 'People who are more physically active have a lower risk of bowel cancer,' confirms Claire.

Don't worry if you're daunted by the gym – there are various ways to hit the recommended 30 minutes of physical activity five times a week. 'For example, walk the dog, do housework or choose to take the stairs instead of an escalator.'

6 Watch the booze

'It's estimated that 6% of bowel cancer cases in the UK are linked to alcohol,' says Claire.

With that in mind, try to stick to the weekly limit of 14 units (six pints of beer, six medium-size glasses of wine or seven double measures of spirits) and have at least two booze-free days each week.

WORDS: DEBRA WATERS. PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK. *BOWELCANCERUK.ORG.UK.
IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, PLEASE SEE YOUR GP. CONSULT YOUR GP OR MEDICAL
EXPERT BEFORE TAKING NEW SUPPLEMENTS OR MEDICATION

A body to die for

In a showcase from our sister site Truly, we hear from a woman whose rear end almost ended her

Sister Tegan (left) drove to Mexico, fearing the worst

Growing up as a twin, it must be hard not to compare yourself to your sibling.

For Tegan's sister, who now goes by the name of 'TheeHtxHottiee', it was something she found particularly difficult.

'Being a twin affected the relationship I had with my body, because my twin sister was always the naturally more curvy one,' she explains.

'I grew up in a little town in Texas,' she says. 'When I had my son, I was 13 days away from being 18 years old.'

Still so young, her shape was constantly changing.

'Having a child changed my body in ways I was not ready for,' she says. 'I had stretch marks, I had hormonal imbalances, I had PCOS (polycystic ovary syndrome). All these things that caused me to maintain or gain weight.'

'I was unhappy with my body,' she admits.

So she decided to do something about it.

'I worked out,' she says. 'I ended up losing 30lb naturally.'

Equivalent to 2st 2lb, it was a great achievement.

But it didn't have the desired effect.

'It still didn't make me lose weight and be smaller in the waist,' she explains.

'And bigger in the, you know...' she adds, referring to her backside.

Because having a perfect peach is something that she had always wanted.

So she researched other ways to get the derriere she desired.

'I decided to get my first BBL in 2018,' she says.

A BBL – or Brazilian butt lift – is a procedure in which fat is transferred from another area of the body, like hips or thighs, to the buttocks, to change the shape and size of the bum.

But with BBLs costing around $10,000 in the US, she started looking further afield.

'I went to Mexico,' she says, where the surgery is available for half the price.

Though she admits she was terrified, the procedure went well.

Even if it was painful.

'I felt like I got hit by a bus,' she says.

Although initially pleased with the results, as her body healed, she started to see room for improvement.

'I still had stretch marks,' she says. 'And I wanted more hips.'

So she decided to go under the knife again.

Only this time, things didn't go so well.

'The second BBL, I was in surgery for double the time that I should have been,' she explains. 'I lost a lot of blood.'

After the procedure, she passed out.

'I had an infection in my skin, so I got a graft where they removed skin from my thighs and put it on my stomach,' she explains.

> **My twin sister and mother thought I was gone**

'I almost died, I had to have six blood transfusions, I had five emergency surgeries.'

Things were so bad, her family was alerted.

'My twin sister and my mother were driving down to Mexico by the time I came out of recovery, because they thought I was gone.'

She remained in hospital for three and a half months.

'The worst part wasn't the complications, it wasn't the pain that I experienced,' she says. 'I really, really regret the fear and emotional distress that I put on my sister and my mother.'

'I already have a brother that passed, so to think another sibling is about to be gone, or another child for my mother, that was the worst part for me,' she admits.

Thankfully, she pulled through, but the result wasn't quite what she'd been expecting.

The doctor explained they'd had to add more fat to even out her hips.

Leaving her with a 'booty' she calls 'insane'.

'My butt turned out way bigger than I expected or I even asked for,' she says.

And Tegan questioned why

PHOTOS: FUTURE STUDIOS

Her sibling describes the new look as 'bigger than Texas'

She's had compliments – and criticism

her sister had even wanted the surgery in the first place.

'It was scary when we drove down there, like you were dead,' she remembers.

'I wasn't really focused on your results after the surgery because you almost died,' Tegan says.

But once it became clear that she was going to survive, she was stunned by the size of her sister's behind.

'This thing is huge!' Tegan laughs. 'It's bigger than Texas!'

'I definitely regret it,' her twin admits.

But making the most of her assets, she launched a 'spicy page' on the internet as TheeHtxHottiee.

'I posted in a bathing suit and I showed my butt for the first time,' she says.

And that video was viewed by 8.2 million people.

'The reaction has been pretty good,' she says, with comments like 'simply gorgeous' and 'beautiful lady'.

Although there was plenty of negativity, too, she didn't let it bother her.

'I realised I couldn't win because their only objective was to be mean,' she says.

'You can see judgement on a person's face, or a whisper, or a point, or somebody trying to sneak and take a picture of you.'

When she spots someone looking, she gives them a little wiggle.

'Why are you placing judgement on my booty cheeks?' she laughs.

After the ordeal she's been through, she's not keen on undergoing more surgery.

So she's learning to live life to the full in the skin she's in.

And to anyone that is negative about her 'booty cheeks', she says, 'I'm going to show them to you, and you can kiss them.'

Truly is the home of Amazing True Stories – celebrating difference, maintaining a sense of wonder and confronting the extreme.

Search 'truly' at youtube.com

Now there's no looking back

Follow TheeHtxHottiee @theehtxhottiee.

Homes

Give your home a cosy makeover without breaking the bank

Faux lambskin in Beige, £10, JYSK

Water hyacinth tray, £12.95, Rex London

Ena wide orange stripe bamboo pendant lampshade, £25, Oliver Bonas

Green pumpkin soap dispenser, £5, Matalan

Multi-scallop hand-painted photo frame, £22, John Lewis

Jute place mat in Natural, £5, Walton & Co

Red lacquered wavy mirror, £22, Habitat

Slogan cushion, £10, Online Home Shop

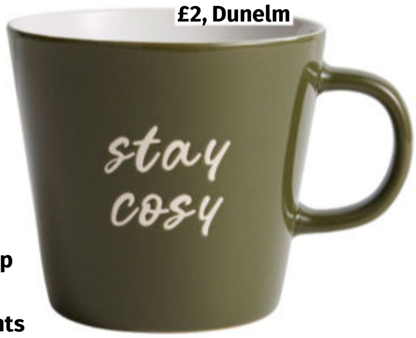
STRIPE
FAUX FUR THROW
HOME COLLECTION
Stripe faux-fur throw, £10, B&M

Tufted cushion cover in Burnt Orange, £10.50, Dusk

Rust-orange glass toothbrush holder, £12.95, Melody Maison

Chocolate cotton storage baskets, from £19.99, Homescapes

Ash bouclé table lamp with bouclé shade, from £22.99, ValueLights



Slogan ceramic mug, £2, Dunelm

Marrakesh rust side plate, £13, Rose & Grey

Pumpkin decorations, £16 for three, Next

ALL UNDER £30

Faux-fur ribbed storage hairpin stool, £26, Online Home Shop

YANKEE CANDLE
golden pumpkin
368 g
Golden Pumpkin large jar, £29.99, Yankee Candle

Hand-painted stripe vase, £14, Habitat

Marl bobble bath mat, £8, B&M

Knot velvet doorstop, £10.25, Furn

Home doormat, £8.50, Matalan

Artificial autumn floral arrangement, £12, Dunelm

Jakar woven straw coasters, £9.99, La Redoute

Alt Optimism champagne glasses, £12.99, Homesense

Cotton knitted pouffe, £29.99, Homescapes

Glass dinner candle holder, from £20, Cox & Cox

Tulip basket natural stripe, £26, The Braided Rug Company

OLIVER BONAS
Issey fringed natural photo frame, £22, Oliver Bonas

Fleece microfibre bed set, £12.99 for a double, La Redoute

COMPILED BY: LARA BERRY

Graham McGill

Smoke

Our last chance to get justice for with a 35-year-old ciggie butt

Gina McGavin, 70, Glasgow

Watching my daughters laugh and play, my heart swelled.

Laura, then 14, and Gail, 12, could be fighting one minute and then best friends the next.

My two were a handful but becoming a mum was the most rewarding thing to ever happen to me.

Later, after tucking them into bed, I sat down with my husband Larry, then 34.

'I don't know how anyone could abandon their kids,' I said sadly.

My own mum, Mary, had left when I was just 2.

I'd grown up with my five siblings and my dad Joe.

While I'd longed for Mum to come home, she'd had five more kids then left them, too.

Mum flitted in and out of our lives.

As I got older, I told myself that I didn't need her.

Now, aged 30, in September 1984, I was a mum myself.

And although I couldn't understand how she'd left her children behind, a part of me had come to understand the pressure Mum had been under.

Yes, she'd made bad choices, but I wanted to rebuild our relationship.

So in the last few months, we'd started talking again.

Then meeting up.

And as I'd learnt more about Mum's difficult upbringing, I was finding my way to forgiveness.

Soon after, Dad passed away, aged 68.

I was heartbroken.

'I'm sorry,' Mum, then 58, told me, sadly, when we met. 'Your dad was a good man.'

And even though she admitted she'd never truly loved him, I could see she regretted the way things had turned out with them.

Truth was, I felt sorry for her.

Everyone in Partick, Glasgow, where we lived, knew Mum as 'Wee Mary'.

Smiley and chatty, she'd talk to anyone.

But looking at her now, she looked tired and sad.

'I'll call you soon,' Mum said, giving me a hug.

Sure enough, a few days on, the phone rang, just as I'd got the girls in the bath.

'Tell her I'll call her back,' I shouted to Larry down the stairs.

But it slipped my mind and days passed.

Then, on 2 October 1984, another call came through.

This time, it was my brother Martin, then 24.

'Gina, it's Ma,' he said. 'She's dead.'

My blood ran cold.

How could she be dead?

Rushing to Mum's flat, I saw police everywhere.

Martin told me

WORDS: JANE HAMILTON. PHOTOS: POLICE SCOTLAND, PA MEDIA

A DNA breakthrough helped catch the killer

Me back in 1984 when Mum (left) was killed

d out

Mum lay

how he'd been unable to contact Mum, so he'd kicked the door down.

Found her lying motionless on her bed.

A murder investigation was launched.

Retracing Mum's steps, police discovered the last time she'd been seen alive was six days earlier, on 26 September 1984.

She'd spent the evening playing dominoes at the local pub, wearing a new green dress.

Afterwards, she'd walked to her favourite chippy.

Got a bag of fritters and a packet of cigarettes.

Later, a taxi driver spotted her walking along the road carrying her shoes.

Another witness claimed they'd seen her in the company of a young man.

So how had she ended up at home, strangled to death with her own dressing-gown cord?

Her killer had left her green dress lying on top of her body, back to front.

It was devastating.

Forensic investigators gathered samples of Mum's hair and nail scrapings.

They also retrieved a cigarette butt, which had been stubbed out in an ashtray on the living-room coffee table.

Although Mum smoked, it wasn't her preferred brand.

That fag end was the only real clue.

There was no CCTV, no DNA database.

The case went cold.

Overwhelmed with grief, questions swirled in my mind.

Who would do this to Mum? And why?

Just as we'd been repairing our relationship, she'd been snatched away from me.

It seemed so unfair.

So I made a silent promise to Mum – I'd never give up fighting for the truth.

Over the years, police officers came and went.

Each one determined to crack the case.

Six thousand people were interviewed, but no one was ever charged.

Tormented by the mystery, I kept talking about Mum.

Even wrote a book to keep her memory alive.

In 2017, police reopened the case again.

While I didn't expect much, I was pleased Mum hadn't been forgotten.

Advances in DNA technology meant that evidence could be reviewed in greater detail.

And in December 2019, police called me.

'We've made an arrest,' the officer said.

I was stunned.

More than three decades had passed.

I was tormented by the mystery for years

Was justice really about to be done?

In April 2021, Graham McGill, then 59, appeared at the High Court in Glasgow, where he denied murder.

The court heard how a forensic scientist called Joanne Cochrane had painstakingly gone through the evidence, which had been preserved in paper bags.

Testing the suspicious cigarette butt, she obtained a full male DNA profile.

> **I'd never give up fighting for the truth**

A direct match with Graham McGill.

Further testing of the dressing-gown cord found another DNA match hidden inside the knot, which had remained untied for 37 years.

At the time of Mum's murder, McGill, then 22, had been imprisoned for previous convictions of rape and attempted rape.

But he'd been on a five-day release when Mum died.

Long enough to strangle my poor mum to death and get back to his cell by the morning.

After being found guilty of murder, McGill was sentenced to a minimum of 14 years.

I sat in the courtroom and stared at him.

He looked so... ordinary.

Just an ageing man in a suit.

Yet he'd damaged so many lives.

After all these years, we finally had justice. But it didn't feel like closure.

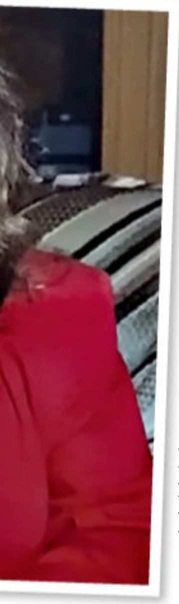
That man robbed me of my mother, of my chance to tell her that, despite everything, I loved her.

Even now, at the age of 70, I still wonder what our relationship would've been like.

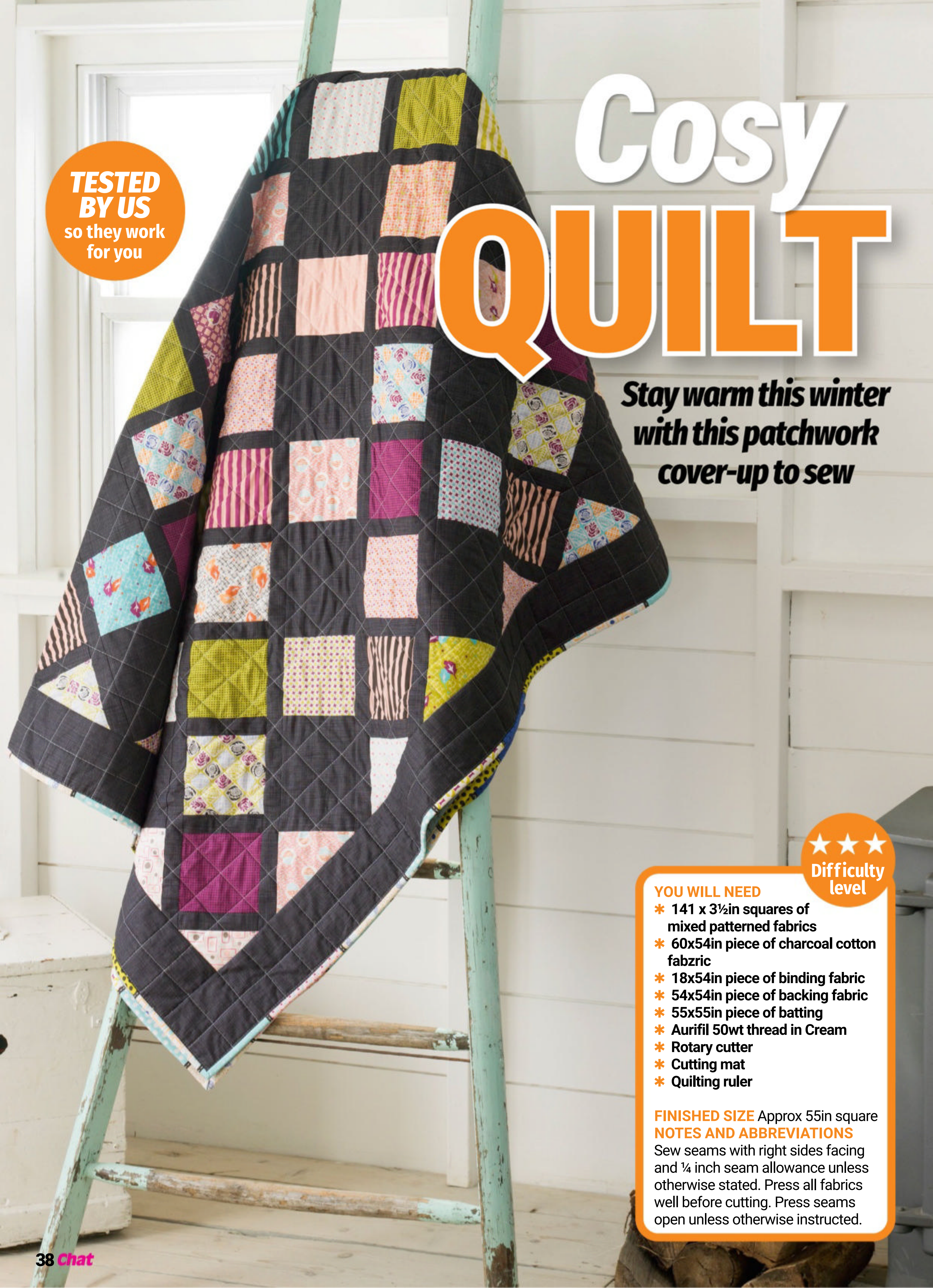
Still think about missing her last call.

People think justice brings peace, but it doesn't.

Not when you never got the chance to say goodbye.



***My Mother's Murder: A Daughter's 35-Year Search For Truth* by Gina McGavin and Jane Hamilton (£7.49, Mirrorbooks) is available now.**



TESTED BY US
so they work for you

Cosy QUILT

Stay warm this winter with this patchwork cover-up to sew

★★★ Difficulty level

YOU WILL NEED

- **141 x 3½in squares of mixed patterned fabrics**
- **60x54in piece of charcoal cotton fabzric**
- **18x54in piece of binding fabric**
- **54x54in piece of backing fabric**
- **55x55in piece of batting**
- **Aurifil 50wt thread in Cream**
- **Rotary cutter**
- **Cutting mat**
- **Quilting ruler**

FINISHED SIZE Approx 55in square

NOTES AND ABBREVIATIONS
Sew seams with right sides facing and ¼ inch seam allowance unless otherwise stated. Press all fabrics well before cutting. Press seams open unless otherwise instructed.

FIGURE 1

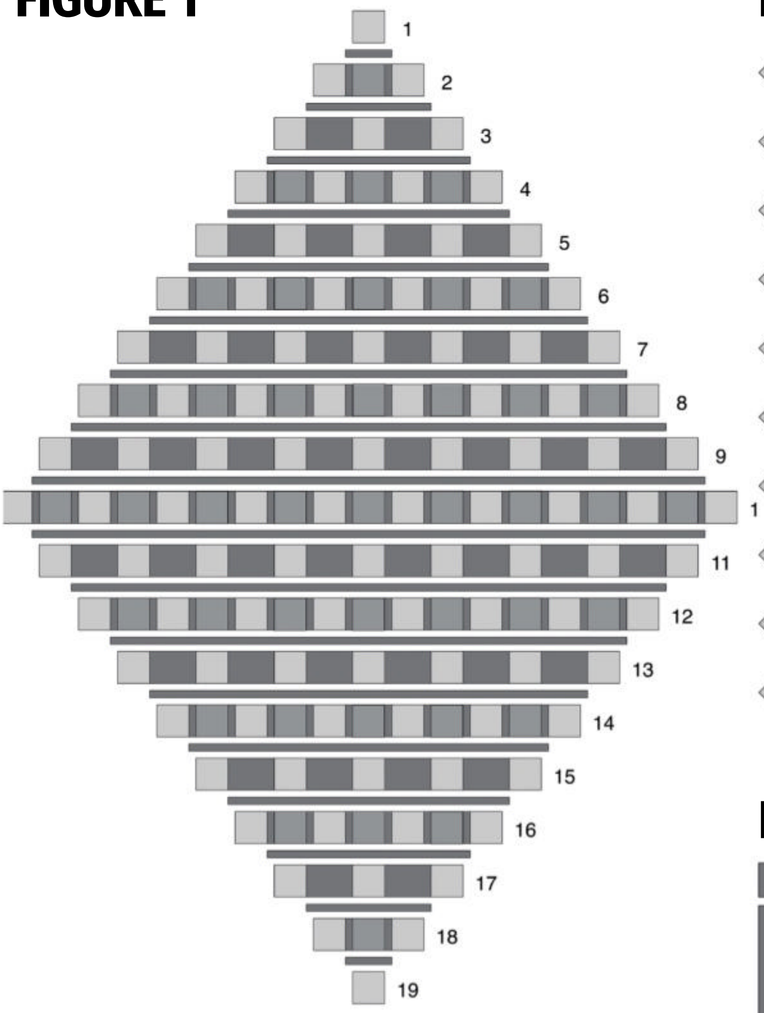


FIGURE 2

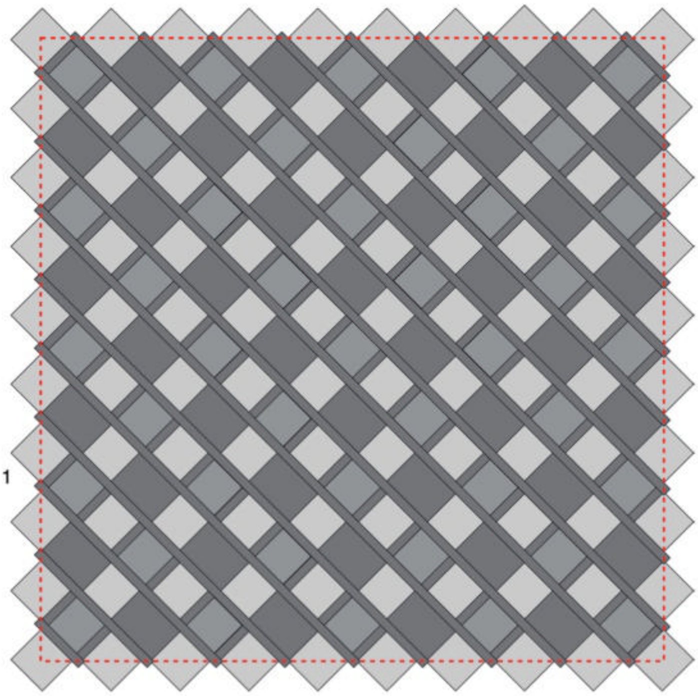
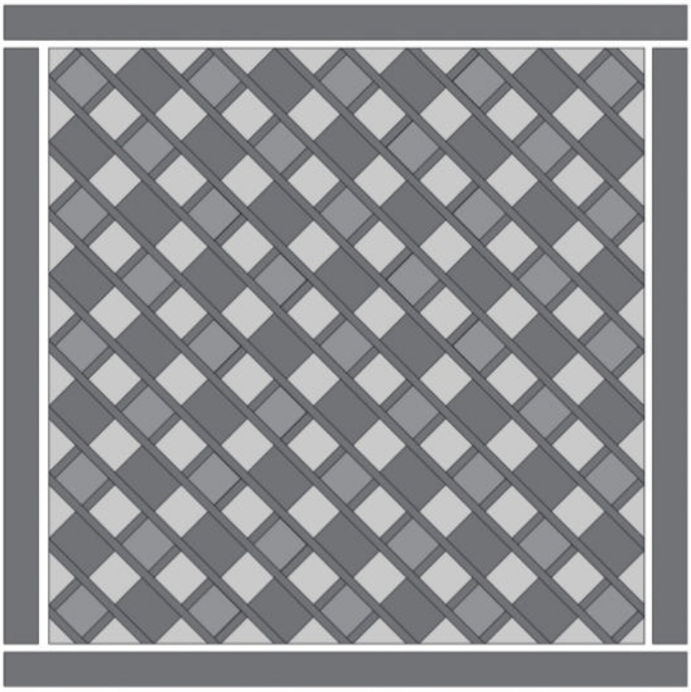


FIGURE 3



1 Cut the charcoal cotton fabric into: two 3½x47¼in and two 3½x53¼in strips, 40 3½x5in rectangles and the rest into 1¼in wide strips. Cut the strips into two of each of the following lengths: 5in, 13in, 21in, 29in, 37in, 45in, 53in, 61in, 69in – you will need to join some of the strips together to achieve these lengths. Cut the rest of the 1¼in wide strips into 82 pieces measuring 3½in long.

2 Follow Figure 1 to join the strips, squares and rectangles together. First sew each individual row, either with patterned squares joined together with strips in between, or patterned squares joined together with 5in-wide charcoal rectangles on alternate rows. Then join the rows together with the strips in increasing lengths – starting with 5in working up to 69in in the middle, then back down to 5in.

3 Once the rows have been stitched together to form the quilt top, follow Figure 2 to trim down the sides until you have a 47½in square.

4 Sash the sides of the quilt top with two 3½x47¼in charcoal strips then the top and bottom with two 3½x53¼in charcoal fabric strips to finish the quilt top, using Figure 3 as a guide.

5 Make a quilt sandwich from the quilt back, the wadding and the quilt top and baste together.

6 Quilt as desired – this quilt has been finished with a diagonal cross-hatch of lines 2in apart using contrasting thread. Trim away excess backing and wadding.

7 Cut the binding fabric into seven 2½x54in strips. Sew the strips together end-to-end using straight or diagonal seams as preferred and press in half along the length with wrong sides together.

8 Pin the raw edge of the binding to the front edge of the quilt, and sew ½in from the edge. When you reach a corner, fold the binding up at a 45-degree angle, then fold back towards the quilt, creating a mitred corner. Continue stitching until you reach the starting point, where the ends should overlap. Press the raw ends under, then sew in place. Fold the binding to the reverse of the quilt and machine-stitch in place.

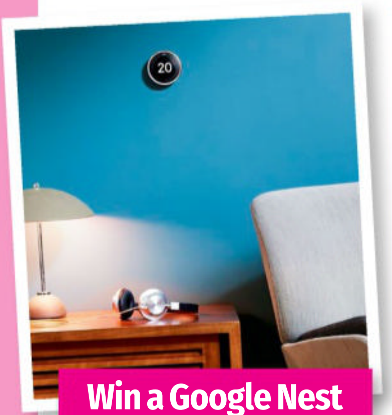
WORDS AND PHOTOS: FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM

PROMOTION

Prizes worth £1,000s

Enter now to win these and many more prizes this month...

Here are just some of the brilliant prizes up for grabs!



Win a Google Nest learning thermostat
1 prize to be won!

Win a 4K digital camera
1 prize to be won!

Win a Tefal Blendforce II blender
1 prize to be won!

Win a VAX SpotWash Duo spot cleaner
1 prize to be won!

Win a Salter digital soup maker
1 prize to be won!

Win a Huawei MediaPad T5 tablet
1 prize to be won!

HOW TO REGISTER

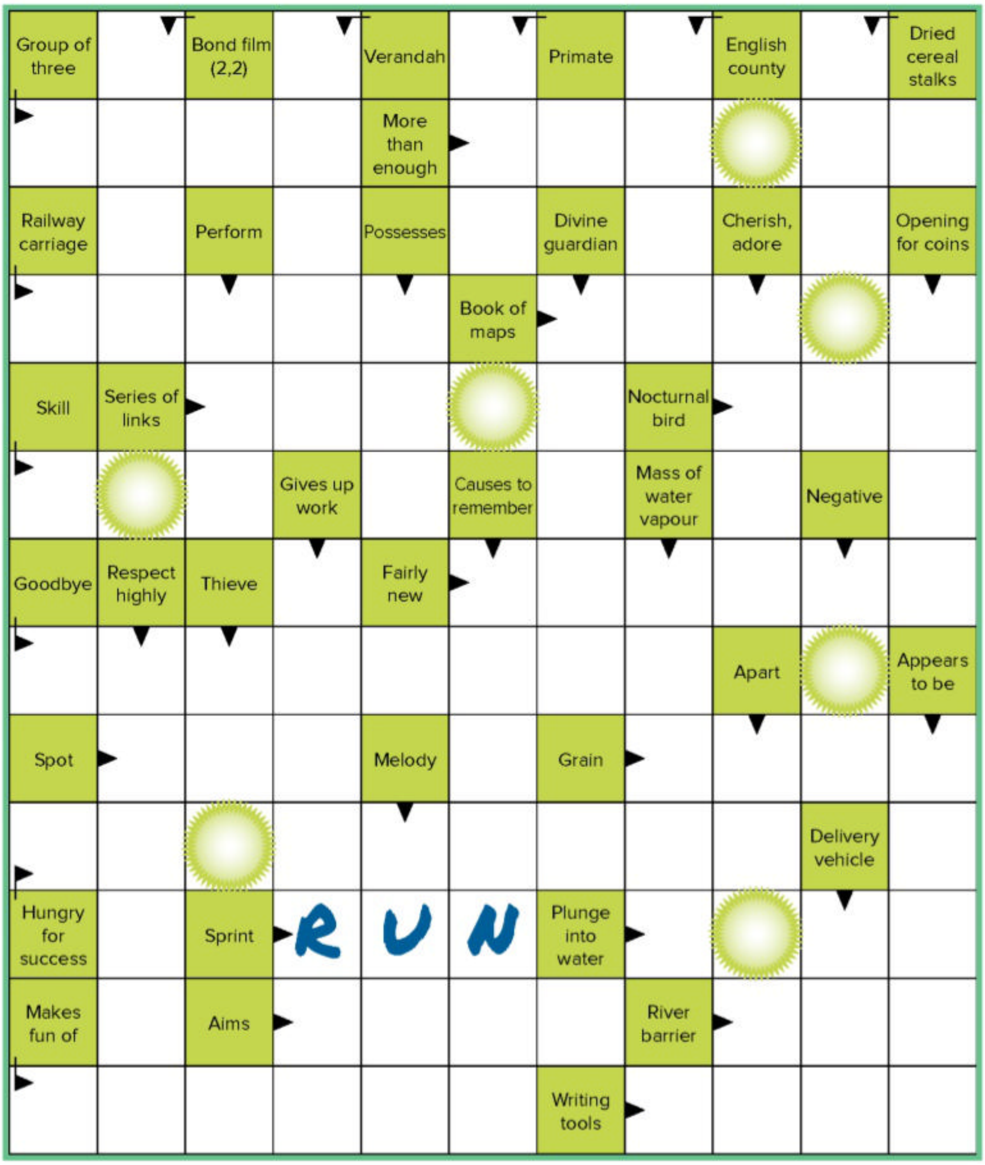
It's FREE to enter and it's so easy to do. Just visit comps.lifedeathprizes.com and register by hitting the Create Free Account button and then you can enter as many competitions as you like. Go on, have fun!

Find out more at comps.lifedeathprizes.com

For website rules of play, go to comps.lifedeathprizes.com/rules. Terms and conditions apply, UK only.

Just for fun PUZZLES!

FILL ME IN


Group of three
Bond film (2,2)
Verandah
Primate
English county
Dried cereal stalks
More than enough
Railway carriage
Perform
Possesses
Divine guardian
Cherish, adore
Opening for coins
Book of maps
Skill
Series of links
Nocturnal bird
Gives up work
Causes to remember
Mass of water vapour
Negative
Goodbye
Respect highly
Thieve
Fairly new
Apart
Appears to be
Spot
Melody
Grain
Delivery vehicle
Hungry for success
Sprint
R U N
Plunge into water
Makes fun of
Aims
River barrier
Writing tools

Wangari Maathai, the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, is noted for her work preserving the Karura Forest on the outskirts of which capital city? **Solve the puzzle by following the arrows and writing in your answers. Then read down the letters in the shaded squares to find the puzzle answer.**

Your answer

CIRCLE TIME

Gyeongbokgung is an example of what type of building, one of five built around Seoul during the Joseon dynasty? **Fit the words into the grid, then read down the letters in the shaded circles.**

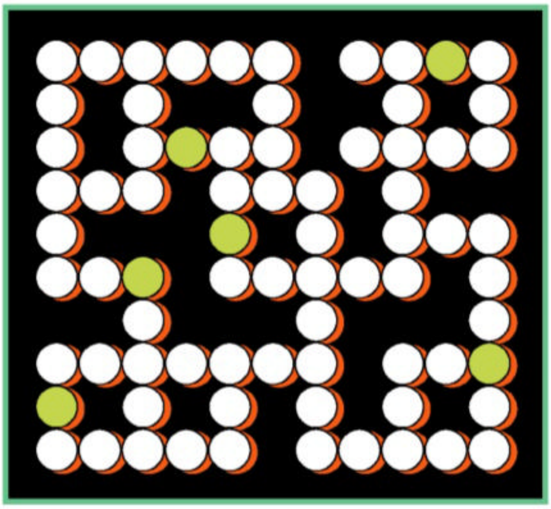
3 letters
ANT
ANY
ARC
ARM
ART
LEA
PEA
SEA
TEA

4 letters
BRAN
GALA
PAPA
PRAM
SAGA
VISA

5 letters
ABYSS
ADEPT
ADMIT
AGREE

6 letters
ABACUS
ABRUPT
ADULTS
ADVERB

7 letters
TOMBOLA
TORNADO



Your answer

PHOTO: GETTY

You'll find the puzzle answers on pages 60-61

Hunted d

As Lorraine walked home fro
mates, a sinister stranger wa

Azam Mangori

A colourful character, often wearing bright sunglasses, Lorraine Cox was 'the most kind-hearted, loving, generous girl' and 'the heartbeat' of her family.

Close to her dad Tony and brother Mark, she missed them and her mates while living in Scotland with her fiancée Elise in lockdown.

So, with restrictions having eased in August 2020, Lorraine, 32, visited her dad back in Exeter.

On 31 August 2020 she celebrated the bank holiday by having drinks in the city with friends.

By the early hours, Lorraine was on her way back to her dad's house.

Drunk and unsteady, she walked alone along Exeter's High Street.

Only, there was a man behind her.

He got closer until he was walking alongside her.

Then he put his arm around her.

There's no way of knowing what was said between the pair but soon after, they turned into an alleyway.

And Lorraine disappeared.

In the days that followed, some of her loved ones received strange messages from her, saying that she wanted no further contact with them.

Hey Papa, I'm sorry. I'm in Plymouth. Please forgive me, was sent to her dad.

It was out of character and they were so worried, they reported her missing.

Police began searching.

Examining CCTV from the night Lorraine vanished, they saw the grainy footage of her walking home.

Noticed the shadowy figure following her.

The last person to be seen with Lorraine.

Soon, they'd identified him as a man who lived above a kebab shop in the centre of Exeter.

On 8 September 2020, he was arrested.

He gave his name as Christopher Mayer but detectives found he was called Azam Mangori.

He'd come to the UK illegally from Iraq and had been living in Exeter for just a few weeks.

At his flat, officers found a blood-stained saw and two knives.

And in a nearby alley, bin bags with grim contents.

Lorraine's body, hacked into pieces.

But not all of it.

Investigators found Lorraine's severed head and naked torso discarded in woodland. Tossed like rubbish.

Horrific.

Azam Mangori was charged with Lorraine's murder.

At his trial in March 2021, Mangori, then 24, admitted preventing the lawful burial of Lorraine's body, but he denied murder.

Exeter Crown Court heard that he hadn't previously known Lorraine.

The prosecution said he'd accosted her as she walked home alone.

Took her up to his flat, where they had sex, and killed her soon after.

Her body was so decomposed, a pathologist was unable to determine a cause of death.

> **In an alley, bin bags held grim contents**

However, a T-shirt found stuffed in Lorraine's mouth indicated it was suffocation.

The jury heard that Mangori dismembered Lorraine's body before discarding body parts in bin bags near his flat and in woodland.

Before that, he'd lived with her corpse for a week.

Mangori's neighbour had noticed a strong smell during that time.

Another neighbour said that Mangori had asked him which day the bins

CCTV showed Mangori walking beside Lorraine

WORDS: LOUISE BATY. PHOTOS: PA IMAGES

own

m a night with
asn't far behind

were emptied.

The owner of the kebab shop below Mangori's flat had seen him getting into a taxi with three bin bags and a large sports bag.

And he was caught on camera buying supplies to help him dispose of Lorraine's body, including the bin bags, tape, a suitcase and a trowel.

In his defence, Mangori claimed Lorraine, a diabetic, had died suddenly in his flat after drinking heavily and inhaling drugs from a piece of foil.

He didn't call 999 because he panicked, he said.

Mangori admitted using Lorraine's SIM card in his phone to send misleading messages to her loved ones, taking over her email and social media accounts. The court heard he also took a pic of her passwords and tried to set up a PayPal account using her details.

But Mangori claimed he didn't remember carving up Lorraine's body.

His defence team said his actions after Lorraine's death didn't prove that he was a murderer.

'Once he's made a decision not to go to police, then whether he flees the scene or disposes of the body it does not make it more or less likely that he's a killer,' said his defence barrister Adam Vaitilingam.

The prosecution claimed that Mangori had gone out specifically looking for a victim to dismember.

His phone records revealed he'd watched online videos of people with amputations days before the killing and afterwards.

But while the jury found Mangori guilty of murdering Lorraine, the judge Mr Justice Garnham rejected the suggestion that the killing had been planned.

Mangori had only intended to 'pick her up' for a sexual encounter, he said. 'Exactly what happened next will not be known unless you choose to tell it,' he added. 'It is clear that something happened in your bedroom that caused you to decide to kill Lorraine Cox by suffocating her.'

The judge said as Lorraine had been intoxicated, Mangori was able to suffocate her 'without significant opposition'.

Jailing Mangori for life, with a minimum term of 20 years, the judge added, 'By your actions, Mr Mangori, you ended the life of a bright, vivacious, intelligent young woman with her whole life ahead of her.'

For Lorraine's partner Elise, Mangori stole a happy ever after. The pair had planned to marry and start a family, with Lorraine carrying the child.

'The colour has been stolen from my life,' Elise said.

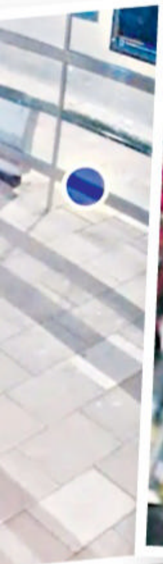
And Lorraine's dad Tony and brother Mark vowed to help make Exeter's streets safer, to avoid another family suffering the pain they'd been through.

In March 2022, the pair led a memorial walk to raise funds for local services including Devon Rape Crisis.

On their 13.1-mile walk through Exeter city, the emotional group traced Lorraine's last footsteps before her death.

'It's what she would've wanted done,' said Tony. 'Because she wouldn't want another girl to suffer, and we can't – knowing what we've known – let that go.'

Lorraine was the 'heartbeat' of her family



Buying supplies to dispose of the body

Beauty

Simple ways to get your best ever skin from top to toe

For your arms

As we get older and our muscle mass starts to deplete, one of the first places we can see crêpey skin is on our arms. It looks thinner, looser and starts to have a similar texture to crêpe paper. It will appear worse when dry so the quickest way to see an improvement is with a rich body cream to hydrate and smooth the skin. If creams leave you feeling sticky, try the new **Vaseline Gluta-Hya Serum Burst Lotion Flawless Tone, £12.99.** Your skin will drink up the lightweight formula that blends hyaluronic acid and glycerol, a duo that will help draw moisture into your skin and keep it there. It's a pleasure to apply, so will be easy to make it a daily habit.

Vaseline
GLUTA-HYA
SERUM BURST LOTION
FLAWLESS TONE
GlutaGlow™, Hyaluron Glycerol
10X With Antioxidant More powerful than Vitamin C
FIGHTS DARK SPOTS FOR EVEN-TONED GLOW
200ml

WORDS: SARAH COOPER-WHITE. MAIN PHOTO: GETTY

delilah
Wake Up
Radiant Eye Perfector

For your eyes

One of the reasons we often stop wearing make-up on our eyes is that it can sit in lined skin, making the problem look worse, not better. If this sounds like you, make sure you're using creamy formulas that glide over the skin rather than sitting in fine lines, and prep the eye area first before you apply any make-up. We really rate **Delilah Wake Up Radiant Eye Perfector, £28, delilahcosmetics.com.** A cross between an eye cream and a concealer, lots of professional make-up artists use it as a first step on their clients to brighten the under-eye area without being drying, and also to hydrate and smooth eyelids.

For your face

There are so many lotions and potions designed to help us ease the ageing process, but if you want results on lax skin there's one ingredient proven to be really effective and that's retinoids. They work by stimulating the skin to produce new collagen, which helps to smooth and plump the skin. Retinoids can be pricey, but it's worth spending that bit extra. **New Roc Derm Correxion Firming Serum Stick, £39.99, Boots,** combines a retinol complex that acts on the skin over time with ingredients that tighten immediately, so you get a double-pronged attack on skin laxity. The roll-on applicator makes it easy to apply.

RoC
CLINICALLY PROVEN
DERM CORREXION®
FIRMING SERUM STICK
+ADVANCED RETINOL
NET WT. 1.0 OZ. (30 G)

For your chest

How often do you lather SPF over your face only to forget about your neck and chest? UV exposure is one of the biggest culprits of creased skin. The sun's rays break down collagen and can cause those annoying vertical lines we can get on our chest. The skin on our neck and chest is also much thinner and more prone to damage, so if you don't already, extending your skincare downwards to your décolleté will work wonders. For an added boost invest in a special neck and chest cream like **Prai Beauty Ageless Throat & Decolletage Serum, £22 for 30ml, Boots.** It helps restore elasticity in the skin, boost collagen and has been clinically proven to smooth skin in just seven days.

PRAI
beauty
Ageless
Throat & Decolletage
Serum
120 mL ℮ 4 Fl. Oz.

For your hands

If the skin on your hands is looking thin, then it's time to take some action. If you're serious about getting more youthful hands then you could try the latest trend for LED mitts – celeb manicurist Iram Shelton swears by them on her A-list clients like Julianne Moore and Teri Hatcher. LED works by emitting red lights into the skin to stimulate collagen and elastin. For real results you need to use them for at least 10 minutes every day and they are certainly an investment. Try **iSmart HandLite, £249, natural-facelift.com.** For the more budget conscious, try a results-driven hand cream instead, like **No7 Pure Retinol Hand Cream, £17.95, Boots,** and apply it up to three times a day. You'll notice results immediately!

No7
Pure Retinol
Hand Cream
FRAGRANCE FREE

For head to toe

For bouncier, hydrated skin all over there's one thing our Beauty Director Sarah really rates and that's collagen supplements. Taking collagen every day helps hydrate skin from within, stimulating your body to make more of its own. It can also have other benefits such as better hair growth and more lubricated joints. There are so many on the market and it can be confusing to know what to buy that really works. Our advice is to invest in collagen that is hydrolysed, as the body absorbs this better, and make sure the one you choose offers a dose of at least 8,000mg per day for optimal results. **Absolute Collagen Crystal Clarity Marine Collagen Powder Supplement, from £27.99** for a two-week supply, can be stirred into a hot drink or smoothie and is completely tasteless.

BEAUTY EDITOR recommends
Absolute™ Collagen
CRYSTAL CLARITY™ COLLAGEN POWDER
NEUTRAL FLAVOUR
8000MG

Healthy and hearty

Loaded with good stuff, these tasty meals will fill you up too

Top tip
If you don't have sesame seeds add a few extra tbsp of oats instead.

Oaty jumbo fish fingers

A grown-up twist on a classic – and better for you!

SERVES 4 PREP 15 MINS
COOK 25 MINS

- 500g salmon, cut into 4 fingers
- 4tbsp oats
- ¼tsp dried oregano
- 4tbsp sesame seeds
- Juice 1 lemon, plus ½ lemon, cut into wedges
- 2tbsp rapeseed oil
- 2 courgettes, trimmed and cut into sticks
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 200g cherry tomatoes

1 Heat the oven to 180C Fan/Gas 6. Line a baking tray with baking paper. Season the fish.

2 Combine the oats, oregano and sesame seeds in a shallow bowl. Pour the lemon juice into another shallow bowl. Dip the fish in the lemon juice and then the oats, turning to coat.

3 Put the fish on the baking tray and drizzle with half the oil. Bake for 20 mins, until golden.

4 Meanwhile, toss the courgette with the garlic and spread over a baking tray lined with baking paper. Drizzle with the remaining oil and cook for 15 mins.

5 Add the tomatoes and lemon wedges to the fish. Turn the courgettes and cook for 5 mins more. Serve with the fish.

PER SERVING: 500 CALS, 35g FAT, 6g SAT FAT, 13g CARBS

Steak and chimichurri salad

Quick and easy, the zingy herb sauce adds plenty of flavour.

SERVES 4 PREP 15 mins COOK 10 mins

- ½tbsp olive oil
- 200g sirloin or rump steak
- 250g pouch ready-to-eat quinoa
- 60g rocket
- ⅓ cucumber, chopped into small pieces
- 1 carrot, shaved into ribbons
- 75g feta
- 75g pomegranate seeds

For the chimichurri:

- 1 bunch coriander
- 1 bunch parsley
- Juice 1 lime
- 1 garlic clove, roughly chopped
- 1 green chilli, deseeded and roughly chopped
- Thumb-sized piece ginger, peeled and roughly chopped
- 1tsp brown sugar
- 80ml olive oil

1 For the chimichurri, whizz all the ingredients together in a food processor or blender until smooth.

2 Heat a frying pan to a medium heat, add the oil and cook the steak for 3 mins on each side, then remove from the heat and set aside to rest. Meanwhile, cook the quinoa in the microwave according to the pack instructions.

3 Toss the quinoa with the rocket, cucumber and carrot, and arrange on a platter or 4 plates. Slice the steak and arrange on top, then crumble over the feta, scatter with the pomegranate seeds and drizzle over the chimichurri.

PER SERVING: 627 CALS, 36g FAT, 10g SAT FAT, 43g CARBS

Top tip
Swap the quinoa for couscous, it only takes 5 mins to make.

Top tip
Remove the stems from the kale before cooking – they can be quite tough.

Chicken and almond traybake

Save on time and washing up with this all-in-one dinner.

SERVES 4 PREP 15 mins COOK 25 mins

- 1tbsp barbecue seasoning
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 6 skinless, boneless chicken thighs (around 500g)
- 3tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 red onions, cut into wedges
- 2 red peppers, deseeded and cubed
- 200g kale, chopped
- 60g whole almonds

1 Heat the oven to 180C Fan/Gas 6. Sprinkle the barbecue seasoning and garlic over the chicken, then secure each piece into a neat shape with a cocktail stick.

2 Pour 1tbsp of the oil into a baking tray and arrange the chicken thighs on top along with the onions and peppers.

3 Drizzle 1tbsp of oil over everything. Cook for 20 mins, until the chicken is lightly browned.

4 Turn the chicken and vegetables, then add the kale and almonds. Sprinkle with salt and drizzle with the rest of the oil. Cook for 5 mins, until the almonds are toasted.

PER SERVING: 372 CALS, 20g FAT, 2g SAT FAT, 10.5g CARBS

COMPILED BY: GEORGIA SPARKS. RECIPES AND PHOTOS: FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM

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CODE DL87E

Great reads

The best new books you'll love

The Pieces of Us

by Claire Alexander (£9.99, PB, Penguin)

Three generations of women. Three life-changing events.
The Pieces of Us
'This book has all the feels – I ADORED it' FAITH HOGAN
CLAIRE ALEXANDER

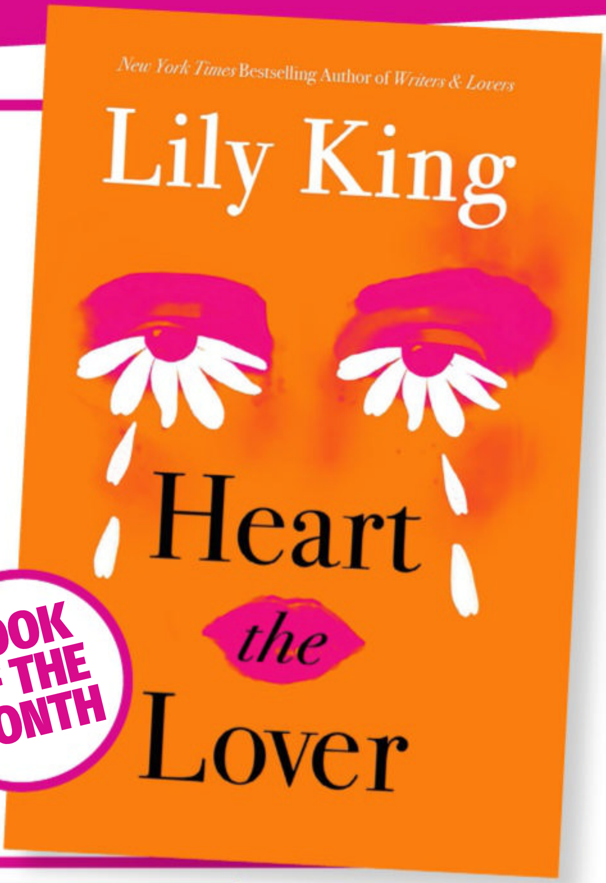
From the author of *Meredith, Alone* comes this poignant novel that delves into the lives of three generations of women – Minnie, Cat and Ruby McAllister – each confronting life-altering challenges. Minnie battles Alzheimer's, Cat uncovers unsettling truths about her mother, and Ruby faces a pivotal decision about motherhood. As their paths intertwine, they uncover family secrets and redefine their identities. With themes of resilience, memory and the complexities of womanhood, this novel offers a heartfelt exploration of familial bonds and personal growth.

Heart the Lover

by Lily King (£18.99, HB, Canongate)

A tender, devastating exploration of first love, betrayal and the fateful choices we make at pivotal moments in our lives. Set against the intoxicating backdrop of a final year at college, the narrator becomes entangled in a charged and consuming friendship with the brilliant Sam and the mysterious, elusive Yash. Years later, an unexpected knock at the door reawakens long-buried passions, regrets and unanswered questions. With lyrical prose and emotional depth, Lily King delivers a beautiful tale of love's enduring imprint and an unforgettable read.

BOOK OF THE MONTH


New York Times Bestselling Author of Writers & Lovers
Lily King
Heart the Lover

Miss Winter in the Library with a Knife

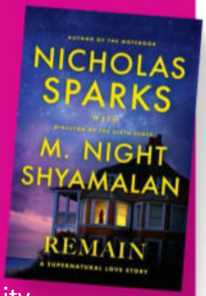
by Martin Edwards (£16.99, HB, Bloomsbury)

MARTIN EDWARDS
Miss Winter in the Library with a Knife
'A true master of British crime writing' RICHARD OSMAN
Find the clues. Play along. Solve the murder first.

Fancy a trip to the remote village of Midwinter at Christmas to solve a whodunnit? A group of writers, podcasters and publishers – all true crime fans who've 'failed' in their careers – join the adventure. Seasoned crime writer Harry hopes to win a top prize, but when bodies appear, he realises a murderer is among them and he could be next. Love solving clues and puzzles? This mystery contains codes to crack along the way.

Remain

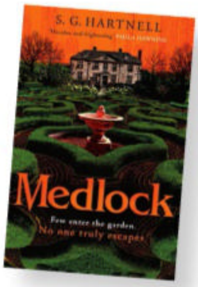
by Nicholas Sparks with M. Night Shyamalan (£22, HB, Little, Brown)


NICHOLAS SPARKS
M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN
REMAIN

Architect Tate Donovan seeks a fresh start in Cape Cod after the loss of his sister and a stint in a psychiatric facility. There, he meets Wren, a mysterious woman who challenges his rational world view. As their connection deepens, Tate uncovers unsettling truths about Wren's past, blurring the lines between reality and the supernatural. Sparks' collaboration with M. Night Shyamalan – the US filmmaker behind *The Sixth Sense and Signs* – explores themes of love, grief, and the boundaries of life and death.

Medlock

by S.G. Hartnell (£16.99, HB, Little, Brown)


S. G. HARTNELL
Medlock
Few enter the garden. No one truly escapes

In this atmospheric Gothic horror novel, Hartnell reimagines children's classic *The Secret Garden* through the eyes of Mrs Medlock, the enigmatic housekeeper of Marwood Manor. Set in 1978, the story unfolds as distant relative Mary arrives at the manor with a desire to explore. The long-buried family secrets she uncovers threaten the fragile balance of the household. With its haunting ambience and psychological tension, Medlock offers a chilling exploration of hidden truths and the darkness within.

6 reasons to visit...

Cancún

White sands, turquoise waters, brilliant food – the Mexican city has it all. And with cheap direct flights and affordable all-inclusive resorts, it's closer than you might think

No jacket required!

1 Great-value sunshine

While the UK is shivering under grey skies, in January the daytime highs in Cancún hover at around 27C. Throw in bright blue skies and warm sea (around 26C!) and it's a brilliant place to book for a dose of winter sunshine. And despite the fact that it's on Mexico's Caribbean coast, thanks to an abundance of affordable packages, it can actually be cheaper to visit than many of the sunny destinations closer to home.

WORDS: SAM MURRAY. PHOTOS: GETTY, ALAMY

2 Fabulous beaches

With around 20km of beaches to comb, Cancún is fly-and-flop heaven. Playa Delfines is among the top picks in the area. Arrive early to snag one of the thatched parasols. Alternatively, jump in a cab to Puerto Morelos, a laid-back fishing village with golden sands and a small plaza surrounded by restaurants and souvenir shops.

Find bliss on Playa Delfines

Ideal spot: the Hotel Zone

3 Chic all-inclusive hotels

The Zona Hotelera, or Hotel Zone, has a row of stylish, all-inclusive hotels that come with top-notch restaurants, culture and vibrant entertainment. And, of course, the beaches here are great too – with Nichupte Lagoon on one side and the Caribbean Sea on the other, you'll be only moments from that stunning coast. Spend a week here shuttling from hotel pool to sands, cooling off in between with margarita cocktails.

4 Day-trip explorations

The wider Riviera Maya coast just south of Cancún has plenty to offer. Head to Playa del Carmen to peruse knick-knack shops on buzzy La Quinta Avenida, Tulum for jungle (or beach) yoga studios, and Akumal to snorkel with sea turtles. And try swimming in a cenote or natural sinkhole. Cenote Jardín Del Edén, a 90-minute drive from Cancún, is particularly idyllic.

Visit Playa del Carmen

Tuck into tasty tacos

5 Tacos, tacos, tacos

Cancún is packed with international restaurants, but make sure you also discover the culinary heritage of Mexico. Don't pass up the opportunity to eat at a traditional taco outlet. They're authentic, cheap and, more often than not, serve food to rival upscale resort restaurants. Head downtown to Tacos Rigo for a varied selection (their tacos al pastor are amazing) or El Polilla, for pulled pork-style tacos known as carnitas.

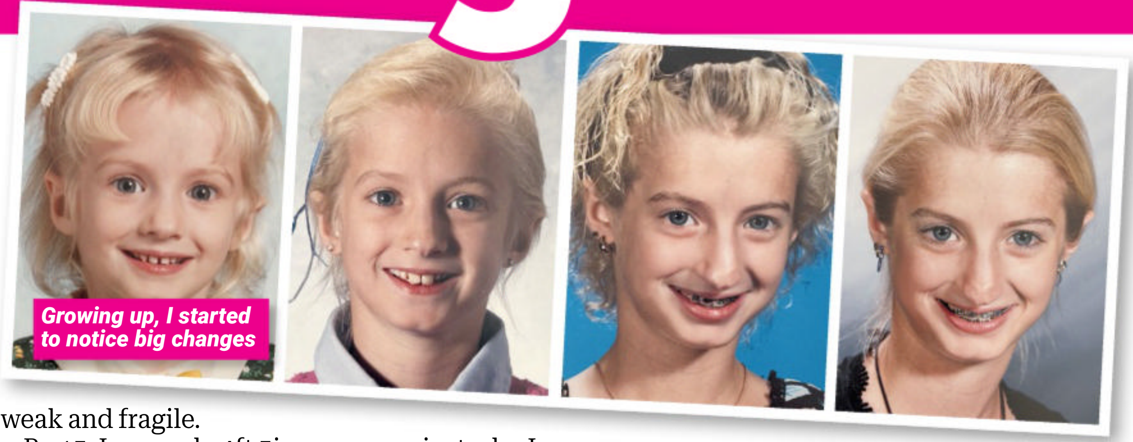
6 Ancient history

Cancún is full of local history. Get an overview at the Museo Maya de Cancún, home to a treasured collection of ancient artefacts. Then take the short stroll to the San Miguelito archaeological site, where you can admire the ruins of a Maya palace and pyramid. Finally, visit El Rey, with small temples and a pack of sunbathing iguanas. World-famous site Chichén Itzá can be visited on a day trip, too.

An iguana catches the rays at El Rey

Always check the latest travel advice before booking a trip

Making it co



Growing up, I started to notice big changes

Running around the garden, I tried hard to catch my big brothers Todd, then 13, and Chad, 10.

'Keep up Lil' Tiff,' Todd grinned, racing ahead.

It was 1983, and, just 5, my tiny frame had earnt me my nickname.

See, Todd was tall, with dark curly hair, like our dad Michael, then 36.

But Chad and I were the total opposite.

With wispy blonde hair, we looked just like our mum Linda, then 33.

Not that it mattered, we were all so close.

But as I got older, I started to notice differences between me and my friends, too.

They'd grow their nails long and paint them pink, yet mine were so brittle, they hardly grew at all.

I bought stick-on false ones, desperate to fit in.

But while other girls at school styled their long, luscious locks, my hair was weak and fragile.

By 15, I was only 4ft 5in and I was having trouble with my teeth, too.

When they all started crumbling and falling out, the dentist was stumped.

My hair was sparse, even my nose was changing shape, getting thinner, more pointed.

Chad was the same.

Mum took us to see various doctors, but they couldn't work out why it was happening.

Docs couldn't work out why it was happening

Still, I was bubbly and outgoing, and I had plenty of friends.

So I tried to accept this was just who I was.

But it was hard.

In my early 20s, I had a nose job to try and replicate how it used to look.

I restored my smile with 3D-printed dentures.

And in time, I met someone and got married.

But as the years passed, Chad's health was worsening.

He'd broken both legs multiple times and had issues with his spine.

And after he was diagnosed with cardiovascular disease, in 2002, docs revealed he needed open-heart surgery.

'They don't know what's causing it,' Chad, then 30, said.

The same thing we'd both been told our entire lives.

After the op, Chad, Mum and I went for genetic testing.

'It's called Hutchinson-Gilford progeria,' a doctor told us afterwards.

It caused rapid ageing – around seven times the normal rate.

'Only around 350 people worldwide have it,' he said.

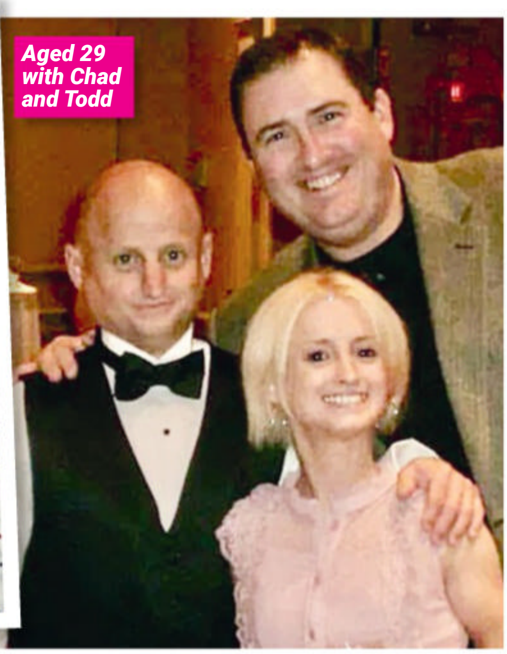
It was the reason for Chad's skeletal abnormalities and cardiovascular problems.

Our below-average height and weight, thinning of the nose and lips, hair loss and teeth issues, too.

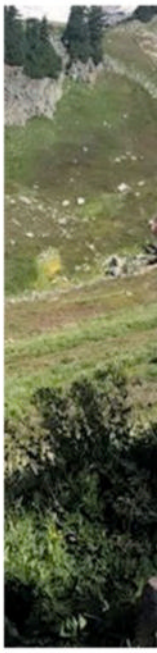
'There's no cure,' the doc explained. 'Most patients don't live past 14.'

It was shocking – I'd already more than doubled

Chad and I took after Mum, while Todd was like Dad



Aged 29 with Chad and Todd



WORDS: ASHLEIGH PAGE, LUCY LAING. PORTRAIT OF TIFFANY: JAMES GODWIN

ount

Docs said I should've been dead at 14. Over 30 years later...

Tiffany Wedekind, 47

my life expectancy.

And I was living in the body of someone who was 217!

But there was no treatment.

'We'll keep an eye on your heart and bones,' the doctor said.

I tried not to dwell on what the future might hold.

Having always been fit and active, I kept up doing yoga and cycling.

I ate healthily and felt lucky that I wasn't experiencing heart problems.

But Chad's health continued to decline.

In September 2011, aged 39, he was admitted to hospital with an infection.

As I sat by his bedside, his face looked pale.

'I won't make it to 40,' he said, rasping. 'Live your life to the fullest.'

'I will,' I promised.

Days later, he took his last breath.

Mum, Dad, me and Todd were all devastated.

Seeing Chad lose his life to progeria made me realise I was already living on borrowed time.

Remembering my promise to my brother, I took stock of my life.

I divorced my husband, quit my job and set up my own yoga studio.

Branding myself 'Tenacious Tiffany', I began speaking about progeria online.

I wanted to educate people and even appeared in a documentary about my condition.

> **I want to educate people about my condition**

'I want my light to shine,' I told Mum.

'It already does,' she said to me, proudly.

Sadly, in September 2024, Mum passed away from cardiovascular issues related to progeria, aged 75.

Now, all my hair is gone and I have a full set of 3D-printed teeth.

But I'm happy to be alive.

I'm still posting all about my condition and sometimes people comment mean things online.

About my height, my looks, my wig.

But their opinions just bounce right off me.

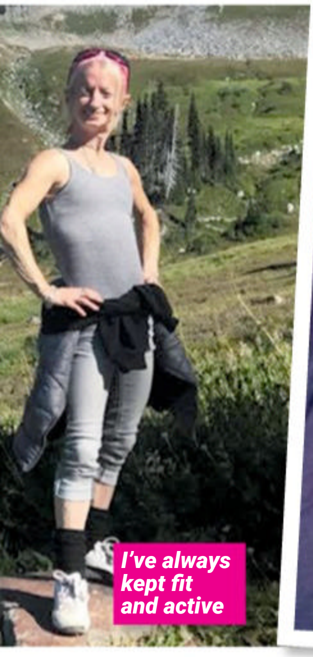
At 47, I'm the oldest known living person with progeria.

That makes my bodily age 329!

I might be old before my time, but I have a lot of living left to do.

And I'm making each day count.

After losing Chad and Mum, every wrinkle is a privilege.



I've always kept fit and active

With my mum when I was 35

I'm determined to live life to the full

It's bingo time

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Just for fun PUZZLES!

CODE CRACKER

How does Denise Van Outen describe the feeling of getting older? To find out, solve the puzzle... Fill in the grid. Each letter of the alphabet has been replaced by a number from 1 to 26. When you've completed the grid, the shaded squares will spell out the one-word prize answer. We've given you four letters to start off.

Your answer

A	B	~~C~~	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	~~K~~	L	~~M~~
N	~~O~~	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

■	4	■	20	■	10	■	25	■	■	■
20	24	2	1	9	**15**	■	18	10	10	12
■	6	■	19	■	9	■	4	■	9	■
■	21	9	19	9	13	**1**	4	18	12	■
■	9	■	15	■	18	■	18	■	14	■
7	15	9	1	21	■	**10**	15	8	11	11
■	■	■	4	■	26	■	■	■	8	■
12	3	1	19	■	16	**18**	9	6	15	16
■	1	■	■	■	15	■	3	■	■	■
■	22	1	12	15	24	16	9	15	23	16
■	18	■	7	■	17	■	**6**	■	24	■
8	4	24	6	23	14	24	22	24	26	■
■	■	■	**9**	■	24	■	■	■	1	■
2	18	6	21	1	4	■	21 M	24 O	7 C	25 K
■	5	■	■	■	18	■	9	■	■	■
5	8	18	12	**23**	■	10	6	1	12	25
■	9	■	23	■	20	■	13	■	18	■
■	23	8	6	5	8	24	**1**	12	18	■
■	24	■	1	■	21	■	17	■	1	■
19	6	1	4	■	17	6	9	3	**4**	12
■	■	■	**19**	■	12	■	4	■	19	■

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
						C						
14	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**	**21**	**22**	**23**	**24**	**25**	**26**
							M			O	K	

WORD JUMBLE

A village built near Mellieha in Malta as a set for which 1980 film is now a visitor attraction dedicated to its titular cartoon character? Unscramble each group of letters to discover six animated TV shows. Now fit them across the grid and you'll spell out the answer to the question.

1 GP PIP APE
2 NO OUTCAST
3 UPSET RED
4 MN BREN
5 DYLAN HERO
6 SHE BERTH

1	P			▨					■	■
2	O			▨						■
3	■	S		▨						■
4	M			▨			■	■	■	■
5	■	H		▨						
6	■	T		▨						■

Your answer

PHOTO: GETTY

Globe-trotte

We loved holidays so much we decided we'd never come home

Leona Burton, 39, here there and everywhere

WORDS: MISHAL KHAN, ANN CUSACK. PHOTOS: FOCUS FEATURES

Counting the last pennies in the tin, I turned to my partner Lee, then 21. 'We're going on holiday!' I squealed excitedly.

The towers of coins on the table totalled around £200.

Just enough for me, Lee and our two eldest, Kian, then 4, and Kye, 2, to enjoy a bargain, week-long, all-inclusive trip to Spain.

Amazing.

Our youngest, Enna, 11 months, stayed back with her grandparents.

It was May 2008 and while I studied business at college, Lee worked in a factory.

We'd struggled to save up for our first family holiday but were desperate to get away from drizzly England.

The minute the sun hit my skin, I knew it was worth every penny.

'I could get used to this!' I said from my sun lounger.

Back at home it was back to the grind.

In February 2014, we had our daughter Olana, followed by Elis three years later.

Life with five kids was busy. Especially when I set up my own networking company, called Women in Business.

Lee came on board too, working on the admin side.

We juggled it all, ferrying the kids to and from school, then to swimming lessons, football matches and dance classes.

The only time we relaxed was when we managed a family break in the sun.

With business going well, we didn't have to scrimp and save as much for them now.

Then, in March 2018, I watched a documentary called *Minimalism*.

It was about living a simple life anywhere in the world, with very few possessions.

Looking around our living room with its piles of plastic toys, stacks of books and a towering laundry basket, it felt very tempting indeed.

> **We were left with just a suitcase each. It was so liberating**

And a few days later, I sat down with Lee.

'I think we should move abroad,' I said on a whim.

We loved the sun, were self-employed, so we could work from anywhere.

What exactly was stopping us?

I was expecting Lee to talk me out of it, but he was all for it.

'Let's go!' he grinned.

So we got cracking.

Over the next six weeks we sold practically everything we owned on Facebook Marketplace. Our furniture, cars, most of our clothes...

We made a total of £12,000.

Were left with just a suitcase each.

'It's so liberating!' I told anyone who'd listen.

Then we gave our landlord the required month's notice.

Online, I found a four-bedroom house in Ronda, Spain, with a giant pool.

Convincing the kids wasn't hard!

'We'll homeschool,' I said.

As we touched down in Ronda in May 2018, I knew we'd made the right decision.

We all loved our new life in the sun.

But the first year of homeschooling was torture.

'What are we doing?' I asked Lee, as we struggled to mirror the class routines they'd had at school.

But we realised we could adjust it to suit us.

So the kids would log into their online lessons in the morning while me and Lee worked.

Freeing up the afternoons for family fun.

We'd head to the beach, explore towns and villages.

The kids loved it, they even picked up some Spanish.

And Lee and I had never felt more relaxed.

At the end of 2019 we packed up once more and moved to the USA.

And for three months

North to Canada

ers

Back in Spain, with baby Milea

Winter in New York

Paddling in the Dominican Republic

we explored Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia, followed by Mexico, which was an incredible experience.

The kids even got to feed the local monkeys when they visited our balcony.

As the pandemic loomed, we returned to Spain.

But as soon as travel restrictions eased, we were itching to move again.

This time, to the Dominican Republic, where the kids discovered beautiful waterfalls, and spent every day in the ocean.

It was a far cry from Blighty!

Then it was back to the States, Portugal, Croatia...

We spent three months in each place.

Renting furnished houses, buying bits and bobs we might need, like a kettle or a slow cooker.

When it was time to pack up, we donated things, or left them behind for others.

In May 2023, we added to our travelling brood with our youngest, Milea.

Born in the UK, but she'd already travelled to seven countries with me during my pregnancy.

So far, we've lived in 10 countries and we're keen to add more, like Australia, Indonesia and Thailand.

At the moment we are in Mexico. But who knows where we will end up next!

We occasionally go back to the UK for work and to see loved ones.

And although we miss some home comforts like Greggs sausage rolls and baked beans, we love our worldly adventures more.

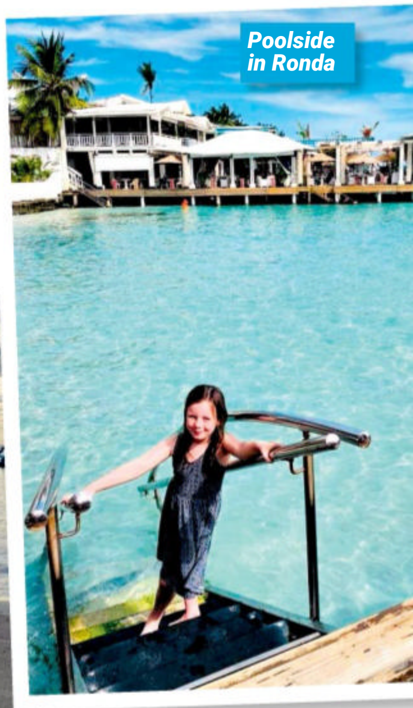
Every day is a holiday. 'Home is wherever my family is,' I tell people.

It might not be for everyone, but globe-trotting with my clan is the best decision I ever made.

My only regret is not starting sooner!

Up close to nature in the Caribbean, and exploring Andalusia

Saluting the sun in South Carolina



Poolside in Ronda

BEHIND THE BIG CRIME

The darke
secre

Would the mystery of this tragic tot ever be solved?

Joanne Sharkey was arrested 25 years on

Surrounded by beautiful countryside, the village of Callands in Cheshire is a quiet suburb.

With leafy woodland trails, the area is popular with dog walkers and families.

But on 14 March 1998, a shocking discovery rocked the community.

Out walking his dog with his young son, a man came across a black plastic bin bag, double wrapped and tied up in a knot.

Curious, he poked a hole in it with a stick.

And when he peered inside, he found the tiny body of a newborn baby boy.

Weighing 7lb 5oz, he'd been dumped like a piece of rubbish.

During a post-mortem, it was found that wads of tissue paper had been stuffed inside the baby's mouth.

A murder investigation was launched.

DNA samples were taken from the baby and from blood found inside the bin liners.

But with no match on the database, the baby's mother couldn't be identified.

Officers conducted house-to-house enquiries and took DNA swabs.

Hospitals, midwife services and schools were consulted in an effort to identify any women or girls who may have given birth in secret.

But despite a nationwide hunt, the mother's identity remained a mystery.

Criminal psychologists concluded the baby's mother was a terrified, unmarried teen.

Police named the tot Callum, after the area where he'd been found.

Locals clubbed together to raise money for a funeral.

Children emptied their piggy banks and donations were collected at a supermarket.

On 27 July 1998, baby Callum was buried in a tiny white coffin, carried by a lone pallbearer to Eric Clapton's *Tears in Heaven*.

Around 150 people turned up to pay tribute.

Handmade cards and a teddy bear were placed by the casket.

Police hoped the funeral might be a chance for detectives to identify the tot's parents.

But no one came forward.

Years passed.

Repeated appeals failed to find answers.

Repeated appeals failed to find answers

But baby Callum was never forgotten.

Locals left toys, trinkets and flowers on his grave.

And his story was passed down to new recruits within the police force.

Then, in March 2023, Detective Inspector Hannah Friend, from Cheshire Constabulary, received an email.

Are you sitting down?

After 25 years, there'd been a breakthrough.

In a cold-case review, an updated search of the DNA database had thrown up a genetic match with baby Callum.

Matthew Sharkey, then 28, had been uploaded to the database after being arrested for a minor, unrelated offence.

And there was a 36 billion-to-one probability that Matthew was the baby's full, older brother.

Using public records to piece together a family tree, DI Friend discovered his parents were Joanne and Neil Sharkey.

And in July 2023, officers knocked on their door.

WORDS: JOHANNA BELL. PHOTOS: ALAMY, CHESHIRE POLICE, KEVIN HOLT/DAILY MAIL/SHUTTERSTOCK

est
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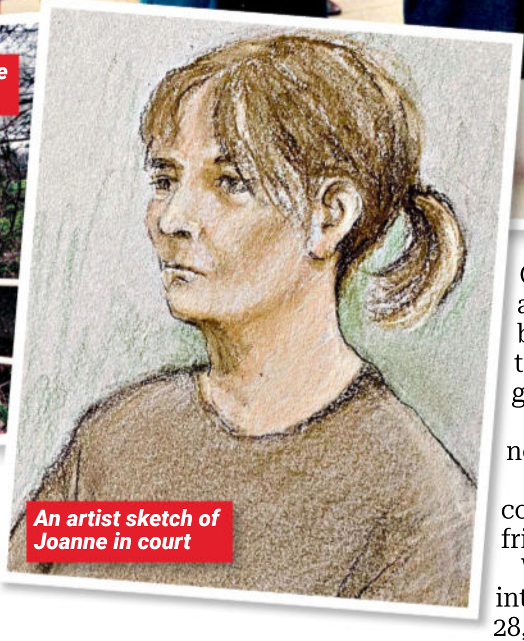
The local community held a funeral for little Callum

Callands in Cheshire where the baby's body was found



An artist sketch of Joanne in court

They found Joanne sitting on the sofa, wearing pink pyjamas with the word 'Mum' on the front.

She was arrested on suspicion of murder and concealing the birth of a child.

'He doesn't know anything about this,' Joanne said, pointing towards her husband of 31 years.

Despite her protests, Neil Sharkey was also arrested in relation to the crime.

In police interviews, Joanne told officers that she'd thought about what she'd done every day and came close to confessing 'a million times'.

'You try and push it out but it creeps back in,' she said. 'It's haunting.'

But, unaware of the pregnancy, birth and death of their child, no further action was taken against Neil.

In April 2025, Joanne Sharkey, then 55, admitted manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility at Liverpool Crown Court.

The court heard she'd battled severe postnatal depression following the birth of her first son Matthew.

After returning to her job as a housing benefits officer, a year later, she struggled to cope.

Neil worked long shifts and she was severely depressed.

So when she fell pregnant again, in the summer of 1997, her reaction had been, 'I can't do this again.'

She kept the pregnancy secret, blaming her weight gain on overindulging at Christmas and wearing baggy clothes to hide her growing bump.

Neil had no idea.

Neither did her colleagues, close friends or family.

When she went into labour, aged 28, she shut herself in the bathroom at home.

And then gave birth alone.

During her police interview, she'd told officers that the labour was 'quick and easy'.

But when the baby started crying, she 'just had to make him quiet'.

'I covered his nose and his mouth,' she said.

Afterwards, she'd driven aimlessly until she found the spot in the woods to dump her baby's tiny, lifeless body, 30 miles from her home.

Describing the case as 'both terrible and tragic', Mrs Justice Jennifer Eady said it called for 'compassion', handing down a two-year prison term, suspended for two years.

She also ordered that Joanne Sharkey get treatment for her mental-health issues.

Despite learning of her harrowing secret, Matthew and Neil Sharkey were in court to support Joanne.

In a statement, they said she was an 'amazing mother'.

Neil, 56, even blamed himself for what had happened, admitting he was 'not the greatest husband and father' back in 1998.

Now, Joanne Sharkey is a free woman.

But she will never be free from the haunting memories of what happened all those years ago.

'As a mother you can't help but think what that was like, having to live with looking at your other child for 25 years, thinking you should have two sons. There is no worse punishment than that,' said DI Friend.

HOW TO GET HELP

For help and support regarding maternal mental health and postnatal depression, contact your GP or the Association for Post Natal Illness: apni.org.

Just for fun

THIS MONTH

CODE CRACKER

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ANSWER: LIBERATING

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ANSWER: NAIROBI

JUMBO PUZZLE

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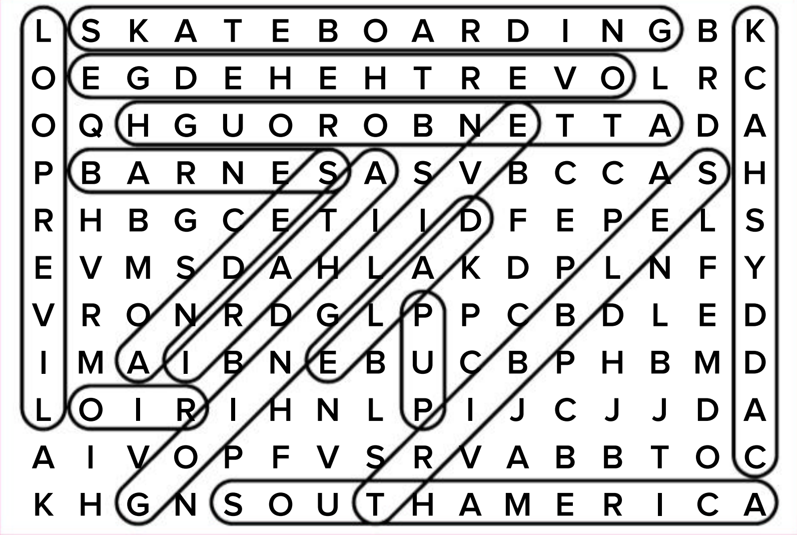
ANSWER: DESERT ISLAND DISCS

THE BIG QUIZ



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ANSWER: TOTTENHAM

WORDWISE Ewer, ewest, hewer, hews, resew, sewer, shew, shrew, slew, stew, strew, sweet, swelter, swirl, thew, threw, trew, twee, tweer, twirl, twirls, weir, welsh, welsher, welt, welter, welters, welts, were, west, wester, wether, wets, whee, wheel, wheels, where, whet, whets, while, whiles, whilst, whir, whirl, whirls, whirs, whist, whistle, whistler, whit, white, whiter, whites, wile, wiles, wilt, wilts, wire, wires, wise, wiser, wish, wisher, with, withe, wither, withers, wrest, wrestle, wriest, wrist, writ, write, writes, writhe, writhes **ANSWER:** ERSTWHILE

LINKWORDS MURDER, COVERS, FALLEN, MARROW, ARMOUR, CENTRE, ACTION, DINNER, TESTED, PORTER **ANSWER:** REVOLUTION

'S ANSWERS

CROSSWORD

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ANSWER: **CATASTROPHE**

CIRCLE TIME

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ANSWER: **PALACE**

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ANSWER: **POPEYE**

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PHOTOS: TRUE LIFE STORIES, BELFAST NEWS & FEATURES

In next month's chat festive special

BEST GIFT EVER? SURPRISE TRIPLETS!

SEX BEAST STRUCK ON CHRISTMAS DAY

PLUS CHRIMBO FOOD, GIFTS, FASHION AND FUN!

PACKED WITH PUZZLES

On sale 27 November

The real n

In a showcase from our sister site Truly, we meet Sier
found a hidden side to herself and learned to embrace

PHOTOS: FUTURE STUDIOS

As Siera watches butterflies flutter around her, she feels at peace.

Her garden is her sanctuary.

'I want to create a wildlife habitat for all the butterflies,' she says. 'I'm creating a space where all of these butterflies can transform and come into their own.'

Something that she can really relate to, as it's taken years for her to become the woman she is today.

Siera grew up like any other little girl.

But as a teen, she started to notice differences between herself and her peers.

'By the time I was 16, I hadn't gotten a period or started going through puberty,' she explains.

'I definitely felt different,' she says. 'I felt like, why am I younger than everyone else, physically? Why have I not matured in that way? It was just weird.'

After confiding in her mum, Kelly, they made an appointment to see a doctor.

'They saw that I had a uterus, but it was really small,' she says. 'It wasn't developing, and where my ovaries should have been, they weren't developing as well, and that's why I wasn't getting any oestrogen that would trigger puberty.'

At first, they were unsure what it meant.

But further investigation revealed her ovaries weren't there at all.

'When the doctors explained that they found no ovaries, it was kind of a shock,' Kelly says.

But before she had a chance to process what that meant for her daughter's future, Siera was already realising just how big an impact this would have on her life.

'I guess I'm not going to be able to have babies,' she said to her mum in that moment.

Something which Kelly describes as 'heartbreaking'.

'I'm sad for mum not being able to have grandchildren from me,' Siera says.

But there was something else Siera needed to get her head around, as medics revealed her official diagnosis.

Chromosomes are the building blocks of the human body.

Women have XX chromosomes and men have XY.

'When I went to see the doctor, I learned that I was intersex,' she says. 'I'm both male and female. I have XY, but I'm a woman.'

While she finally had an answer, it was hard to accept.

'I had a lot of anxiety around it,' she admits. 'To me, intersex meant this is taboo, I don't want to tell anyone.'

Siera was prescribed some medication to trigger female puberty.

'I have to take my hormones, my oestrogen, in order to go through puberty,' she says. 'It's just a standard birth-control pill.'

After starting the meds, she got her first period.

'It was really awkward, because everybody's already gone through puberty and I'm buying my first bras in late high school and just learning how to use tampons and pads,' she says.

She started to realise there were two sides of herself

Now, as long as she's taking the pill, she gets a period every three months.

'With my condition, I'm pretty much in menopause if I don't take it,' she explains.

But Siera still felt there was a stigma attached to being intersex.

'Externally, the doctors considered me a girl,' she explains.

But as her body developed, so did her chiselled jawline. 'I'm 6ft tall and I wear size 11 shoes,' says Siera.

She started to realise there were two sides of herself.

'It reshaped my view of all things gender and how it's looked at in society,' she says.

As she got older, she found it difficult to be accepted, especially when it came

Mum Kelly has always been there for her

She was like any other little girl

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to dating.

'I would worry about telling the person and if it would impact how they felt about me, and if they would want to continue a relationship with me,' she says.

In time, she realised that by coming to terms with her gender identity and finding self-acceptance, it would help others accept her, too.

'Since openly identifying as intersex, it's something I'm really proud of,' she explains. 'In the past couple of years, I feel like it was kind of exciting because it made sense... I'm different, and that's OK with me.'

It changed her attitude towards dating, too.

She stopped seeing men, instead finding herself much more attracted to women.

'Now I'm dating women, I can be open and feel comfortable with it,' she says. 'When I go on dates with people and let them know about being intersex, I'd hope they're just open-minded and curious, and hopefully that's something that wouldn't inhibit them from wanting to continue to get to know me.'

Kelly is hopeful that her daughter will find 'the one'.

'What Siera is searching for is love, and a person that's like her – kind-hearted and compassionate,' says Kelly. 'As she's become a young adult, I feel like she's also learning more about her intersex and she's wanting other people to listen.'

Siera agrees.

'I don't feel like I've gotten too many questions from dates because I feel like most people don't know what to ask,' she says.

'If people understood intersex more, I feel like people would be more understanding and realise it's just who we are,' she says.

'Biological sex isn't binary and I'm living proof of that.'

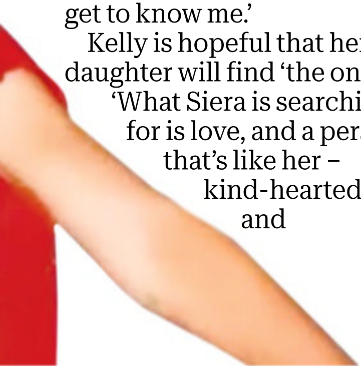
Just like those butterflies, she's been on a journey of transformation.

'I'm proud of who I am,' she says.

Looking beautiful in baby blue

Siera has embraced her gender identity

Follow Siera on Instagram @siera_arena and TikTok @sieraarena.



Truly is the home of Amazing True Stories – celebrating difference, maintaining a sense of wonder and confronting the extreme.

Search 'truly' at youtube.com

Crack a s

Think you know your emojis? Have a go at this fiendish

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WORDS: JOHANNA BELL. PHOTOS: GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK

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ANSWERS

Countries: **1** Turkey **2** Iceland **3** Belgium **4** Wales **5** Ukraine **6** Spain

Songs: **1** *Stairway to Heaven* **2** *Call Me Maybe* **3** *Purple Rain* **4** *Ice Ice Baby* **5** *Radio Gaga* **6** *Hungry Eyes*

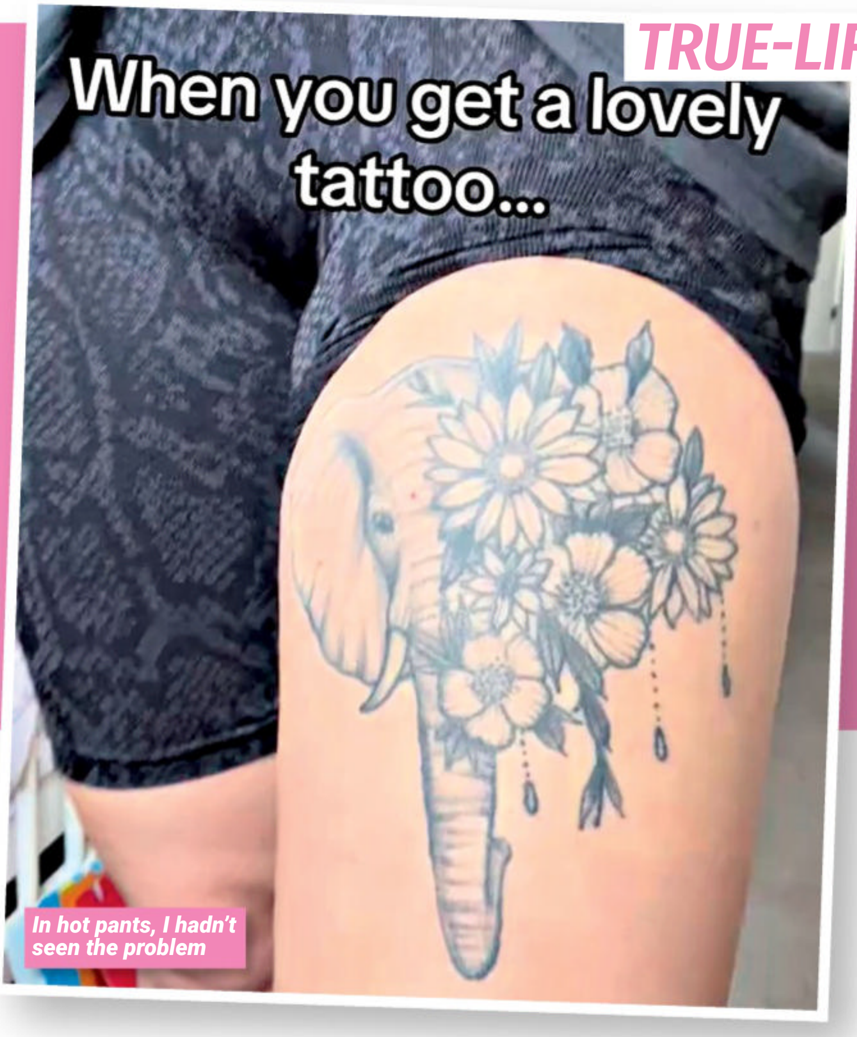
TV shows: **1** *Danger Mouse* **2** *The X Files* **3** *Love Island* **4** *Doctor Who* **5** *Twin Peaks* **6** *Gogglebox*

Films: **1** *Four Weddings and a Funeral* **2** *Singing in the Rain* **3** *The Lion King* **4** *Dirty Dancing* **5** *The Wolf of Wall Street* **6** *Titanic*

Whoa Nelly!

Oops… My new tattoo gave me junk in my trunk

Felisia Greenhalgh, 29, Barnsley


When you get a lovely tattoo...

In hot pants, I hadn't seen the problem

Fresh out the shower one day in August 2023, I admired my tattoos in the mirror.

Roses winding around my left arm, a Dolly Parton quote on my ribs.

'I fancy a thigh tattoo next,' I told my boyfriend Thomas, then 27, later.

'Go for it,' he grinned.

I loved elephants, so I sent ideas to the tattoo artist.

When the day of my appointment came in November 2023, I put on a pair of hot pants to allow easy access to my thigh.

'That one!' I smiled, pointing to a stencil of an elephant's head adorned with flowers.

The tattooist placed the stencil on my left thigh.

'Is that where you want it?' he asked.

'Perfect,' I nodded.

As he started, it was painful, but nothing I couldn't handle.

'I love it,' I smiled, two hours later, paying £180 for the 20cm-long inking.

Over the following weeks, my skin healed.

'It looks amazing,' Thomas grinned.

I couldn't show it off to anyone else yet as it was mid-winter, so I was in trousers every day.

When the weather warmed up in May 2024, I put on black cycling shorts.

Instantly, Thomas looked at me funny.

'That looks dodgy,' he said, his eyes on my thigh.

My tattoo was peeping out from my shorts, with only the trunk visible.

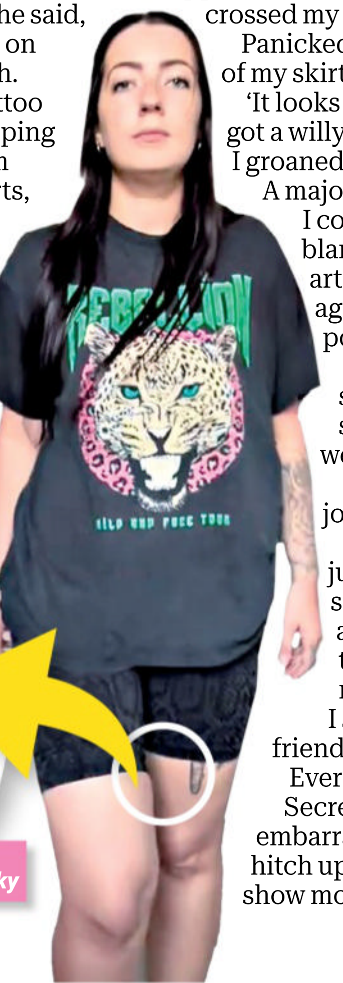
'It looks like a penis,' I whispered.

'Yes it does,' he grimaced.

How had I not noticed?

> **'It looks like I've got a willy dangling!' I groaned**

Just the trunk looks a bit funky



But it was the first time I'd worn cycling shorts since last summer.

I'd worn hot pants for my appointment, so it hadn't crossed my mind.

Panicked, I tried on all of my skirts and dresses.

'It looks like I've got a willy dangling!' I groaned.

A major cock-up.

I couldn't even blame the tattoo artist, as I'd agreed on the positioning!

But I couldn't spend the summer wearing jeans.

So I made a joke of it.

'No, I'm not just happy to see you – it's an elephant tattoo on my leg!'

I sniggered to friends and family.

Everyone laughed.

Secretly embarrassed, I'd hitch up my shorts to show more of my tattoo so it looked less phallic.

And I cringed when strangers clocked it.

I was relieved when autumn came around, but my 'penis' made a reappearance when the warm weather returned this May.

'This could only happen to me,' I tutted.

Or could it?

Picking up my phone, I posted on TikTok.

When you get a lovely tattoo… I typed.

My phone buzzed with likes and comments.

Mostly nice, but the odd mean remark.

But others had made the same mistake!

My vid went viral, helping me feel less daft.

Maybe one day I'll add more flowers to my tat so it doesn't look so rude.

If you're getting a thigh tattoo, think it through.

If I'd gotten mine higher, it wouldn't be an issue.

Instead, I'm stuck with a 'thigh penis'.

They say elephants never forget… well, neither will I!

WORDS: SOPHIE WATSON, LOUISE BATY. PHOTOS: KENNEDY NEWS & MEDIA

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